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by W. Somerset Maugham

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June, 1983

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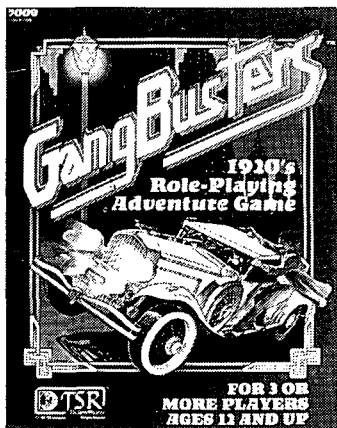


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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

The Mystery Classic in this issue—an Ashenden story called “The Traitor,” by W. Somerset Maugham—is one we’ve chosen because it has two claims to fame. An espionage tale, set in Switzerland during World War I, it comes from Maugham’s collection of stories called *Ashenden, or The British Agent*, which has been heralded as among the first of the modern spy presentations, culminating in recent years with John le Carré’s notable books. Among the first both in its style of storytelling, that afterwards became inalterably intertwined with the spy story in general, and in its demonstration of how modern espionage agents really work. As such, it certainly qualifies as a “classic” tale.

Its second claim to fame—of special interest to AHMM readers—is that a Hitchcock film is based on it. *Secret Agent* (1936) was drawn in general, by way of a play by Campbell Dixon, from all the stories, but this one was central.

It’s been our hope that, along the way, as part of the Mystery Classic series, we could bring you from time to time those stories Hitchcock used in his films. We began that last August, as many of you may recall, with Daphne Du Maurier’s equally classic story, “The Birds.” This is our second offering in that series-within-a-series.

If you have seen *Secret Agent* you’ll find that the Maugham story is still full of surprises. In the movie, for instance, Ashenden did not work alone, as he does in the story. And in the movie, Mr. Caypor was not . . . well, maybe we’d better stop there, for the benefit of those who have missed the movie.

And besides, we have some good news to spread. On May 6th the annual awards dinner of the Mystery Writers of America will take place in New York, the most important event in the mystery writing world. At the dinner, the “best mystery novel,” “best mystery short

story," "best first mystery novel," and so on of the preceding year, selected by the MWA's various awards committees, are named and the prizes, called Edgars (porcelain busts of Edgar Allan Poe), are given out.

The nominees for those awards have just been released, at this writing. And in the interests of letting you share in the suspense, as well as see which works the MWA found most worthy in 1982 in their various categories, the list of nominees follows.

(Needless to say, we'll let you know who won, in a later issue.)

BEST NOVEL OF 1982:

Eight Million Ways to Die by Lawrence Sanders (Arbor House); *Billingsgate Shoal* by Rick Boyer (Houghton Mifflin); *Split Images* by Elmore Leonard (Arbor House); *The Captain* by Seymour Shubin (Stein & Day); *Kahawa* by Donald Westlake (Viking).

BEST FIRST NOVEL OF 1982:

By Frequent Anguish by S.F.X. Dean (Walker); *Unholy Communion* by Richard Hughes (Doubleday); *In the Heat of the Summer* by John Katzenbach (Atheneum); *The Butcher's Boy* by Thomas Perry (Scribner's); *Two If by Sea* by Ernest Savage (Scribner's).

BEST ORIGINAL PAPERBACK OF 1982:

Vital Signs by Ralph Burrows, M.C. (Fawcett); *Clandestine* by James Ellroy (Avon); *The Missing and the Dead* by Jack Lynch (Fawcett); *Triangle* by Teri White (Ace/Charter).

BEST SHORT STORY OF 1982:

"Tall Tommy and the Millionaire" by S. S. Rafferty (AHMM); "A Decent Price for a Painting" by James Holding (EQMM); "All the Heroes Are Dead" by Clark Howard (EQMM); "There Are No Snakes in Ireland" by Frederick Forsyth, from *No Comebacks* (Viking).

BEST FACT CRIME OF 1982:

Somebody Is Lying: The Story of Dr. X by Myron Farber (Doubleday); *The Vatican Connection* by Richard Hammer (Holt, Rinehart and Winston); *Indecent Exposure* by David McClintick (Morrow); *Deadly Intentions* by William Randolph Stevens (Congdon & Weed); *Big Bucks* by Ernest Tidyman (Norton).

BEST BIOGRAPHICAL/CRITICAL STUDY OF 1982:

The Police Procedural by George N. Dove (Bowling Green University Popular Press); *Cain* by Roy Hoopes (Holt, Rinehart and Winston); *Gun in Cheek* by Bill Pronzini (Coward, McCann,

Geoghegan); *Modus Operandi* by Robin W. Winks (David R. Godine).

BEST JUVENILE OF 1982:

Kept in the Dark by Nina Bawden (Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books); *The Murder of Hound Dog Bates* by Robbie Branscum (Viking); *The Case of the Cop Catchers* by Terrance Dicks (Lodestar Books, E.P. Dutton); *Clone Catcher* by Alfred Slote (J.B. Lippincott); *Cadbury's Coffin* by Glendon Swarthout/Kathryn Swarthout (Doubleday).

BEST MOTION PICTURE SCREEN-PLAY OF 1982:

Still of the Night, screenplay by Robert Benton, story by David Newman and Robert Benton (MGM/United Artists).
The Long Good Friday, original screenplay by Barrie Keeffe (Handmade Films).
Evil Under the Sun, screenplay by Anthony Shaffer, based upon the novel by Agatha Christie

(produced by EMI Films in association with Titan Productions; distributed by Universal Pictures).

48 Hrs., written by Roger Spottiswoode and Walter Hill & Larry Gross and Steven E. de Souza (Paramount).

BEST TELEVISION FEATURE OF 1982:

One Shoe Makes It Murder, written by Felix Culver (CBS); *The Big Easy*, written by Lee Hutson (ABC); *Rehearsal for Murder*, written by Richard Levinson and William Link (CBS).

BEST EPISODE IN A TELEVISION SERIES OF 1982:

"Ashes to Ashes, None Too Soon," written by Bob Shayne for *Simon & Simon* (CBS); "In the Steele of the Night," written by Joel Steiger for *Remington Steele* (NBC); "Matt Houston," written by Ken Trevey and Richard Christian Danus for *Matt Houston* (ABC).

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FICTION

Mystery of the Silent Lake

by Ingram Meyer

They were standing at the edge of the little oblong lake, looking over the white and green houseboat that lay moored on the other side. Everything behind it was marshland, and no roads seemed to lead there.

"Good grief!" cried Grandma. "Why would someone put their houseboat in such a funny place? No way to get there but to either row or swim—or take the whole house back and forth. Do you see some sort of dinghy anywhere around?"

"There had better be *something* around to get us there, 'cause you couldn't get me to dip the tip of my toe into this water," said Pixy. "Just look at all the stuff growing here. Cattails as high as a man."

"Speak for yourself, Pixy," laughed Grandma, looking up and down her partner's spare, five-foot-two frame. She herself was a good seven inches taller and forty pounds heavier. "We used to pull them out and collect the roots. Taste like potatoes, you know."

"You ate cattail roots?" Pixy wasn't sure whether she was pulling his leg once again.

Illustration by Ray Lago



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"Oh sure. They don't taste half bad, with chopped-up cooked skunk cabbage and roasted wild duck. When I was young, we weren't fussy like you people nowadays."

"I'm not that young, Gran." Honestly, why he had ever taken her in as partner was now beyond him. He sighed. But the private eye business had been bad ten years ago—still was in these parts of the country—and he had to have a partner, or change professions. And Grandma, not his granny, in fact not anybody's granny really, was clever and tough. He had to admit that. If only she wouldn't boss him around so much.

"Compared to me, everybody is young!" snapped Grandma. "Let's do something to attract what's-her-name, Myra Bush, over there."

And the two detectives whistled and yahoed, and Grandma waved her purse. But nothing moved on the houseboat.

"We shouldn't have come to this forsaken place," said Pixy.

"We're hired to be here. She mailed us one hundred bucks to come as quickly as possible. And now here we are. But where is she? You don't by any chance have your swim trunks in the car, have you?" Grandma spoke more sweetly now.

"No! And even if I did, nothing whatsoever could get me into this mucky mess. Just look at the lake. A person could get stuck in these miserable reeds and drown. If Myra Bush doesn't have the courtesy to meet us with at least a small boat to get us across the lake, then I'd just as soon drive back home."

But Grandma tried once more. "How about getting the inner tube out of the spare tire? I saw the kids of one of our neighbors bopping around on one of those in their swimming pool. Would that be a good idea?"

Pixy didn't even answer.

At the end they drove back along the potholey gravel road to the small community with the funny name and rented a patched inflatable army boat from an old man who also sold fishing bait.

"You drive three miles down the highway, turn left, and you'll find a great little fishin' hole," he said. "Sure you don't want to rent a rod and get some worms? Fish down there are just begging to be caught. Nobody ever came home from there emptyhanded."

"What about the lake down that gravel road over there to the right?" asked Pixy.

"Ol' Creepey Lake? Heck, you couldn't even catch a meal of frog legs in there," cackled the old man. "Horrible corner of the state. Nobody in his right mind ever goes there."

"There's a houseboat on the lake," said Grandma. "You know the owner?"

The man laughed so hard he slapped his knees. "Ain't nobody around these parts admitting to knowing a ghost!"

"Ghost!?" cried Pixy. Oh no, not *that*.

Grandma just looked disgusted. Who did this little hicktown person think he was kidding! But she was even more annoyed with her partner. She knew darned well Pixy believed in the supernatural. Brave as he might be in bright-light downtown situations, he turned into a pathetic chicken in isolated places, especially in old houses and things. It could be very embarrassing at times.

The old man was still laughing and shaking his head as he walked back inside his old frame house.

"You take the little fishin' hole on the left!" he called before shutting the door.

"Crazy old so-and-so. Come on, Pixy, let's get back down to Myra's hideaway," said Grandma. "You drive."

Good! Pixy always felt better when it was his turn to drive their ten-year-old Volkswagen. Grandma could at times be quite the reckless driver.

When they reached the lake, there was a large grey station wagon parked there, and a very tall, bearded, and bushy-haired man was just taking an aluminum boat off the roof rack.

"We heard there aren't any fish in here," said Pixy. "A fellow in that place back there mentioned a very fine fishing hole, though, a ways farther down the highway."

The man laughed. "You must have met up with crazy Lester. He's trying to scare everybody off this place. Did he by any chance also mention a ghost?"

The detectives nodded their heads, a little embarrassed. The man towered over them, and even Grandma only came up to his shoulder.

"Why would he do a thing like that?" she asked.

"Oh, he's just silly. The people down at the motel where I'm staying told me all about these funny folks around here." The man had got his boat down, and Pixy helped him carry it over to the water.

"Lester keeps on hinting about strange things going on in and around the houseboat, at nights. Are you people on vacation in these parts?"

"No, we came to see Miss Bush on her houseboat," explained

Grandma. "But she's either not at home or else she didn't for some reason notice us. Funny though, we yelled loud enough. I hope nothing has happened to her."

"You came to see my cousin Myra? She's been away for quite a while, you know, but she should have come back last night—according to her letter. By the way, I'm Harold Bush. I'm also her lawyer and actually here for a business meeting."

"Pleased to meet you. My name is Smith, and his name here is—well, we call him Pixy," said Grandma. "And it looks as though there's *someone* on the houseboat because the windows are open."

They all stood for a while in silence, looking across the little lake. Then Pixy asked, "Did you say you are her cousin *and* her lawyer?"

"Oh yes, she and I are very close. Myra, my wife Lorna, and I all went to school together."

Pixy got the inflatable boat off the Volkswagen roof and into the water. It was a little awkward getting into it with Grandma. Her side of the boat was so much deeper in than Pixy's.

Following Harold in his own boat, they pulled alongside the houseboat. It was a long, pretty building on a barge, and it was now gently rocking in the green water. The windows were partly open, and ruffy curtains were flapping in the light breeze.

"Are you home, Myra?" called Harold Bush. But there was no answer. "Now *I* am getting worried," he said.

They tied up their boats, then climbed up the rope ladder.

"This is a cute place. I've never been on a houseboat before. Look at these lovely geraniums in the boxes, Pixy. And tomatoes and lettuce." Grandma was impressed. "A real house, with front porch and all."

Harold tried the door. It was unlocked, and they all went inside. They looked quickly through the place, four rooms in all, but Myra just wasn't there. They opened the back door and looked out over the flat marshlands on that side of the lake, but there was no sign of the woman.

"This is eerie," said Pixy. "She must have gone for a walk. There must be some places dry enough among those reeds and funny grasses." And with a mischievous glance at his partner, he went on, "Maybe she's out collecting cattail roots."

"Pixy!" Grandma was shocked. "This is serious. Poor Myra might have drowned."

"Sorry, Gran. What are we going to do now?"

Harold had opened a cupboard and taken out a bottle of whisky. "Can I pour you a glass of this stuff? Whatever it is that's keeping Myra away from here, she'd want her guests to make themselves comfortable."

"Well," said Grandma, "we don't actually drink. Tell you what, I'll go into the kitchen—or is it called the galley?—and see if I can find some coffee things."

Pixy grinned, and while his partner rummaged around in the other room, he and Harold Bush quickly downed a double whisky.

When Grandma returned, holding a tray with three mugs of instant coffee, cream, and sugar, she sniffed suspiciously. Then she burst out laughing.

"Tried to pull a fast one on the old lady, huh?" she said. "Well, what the heck. Give me a snort of the stuff also. Nerves are a bit on edge in this deserted place."

When Myra still hadn't shown up after their second cup, they became seriously alarmed. The men went out and climbed into Harold's aluminum boat, then paddled all along the shore, up a small stream, back, and into the middle of the lake to have a look all around the edges, but there was just nobody there.

In the houseboat again they all sat silently for a while, puzzled.

"I will wait half an hour more," said Harold finally. "And then I'm going to take my boat back to the other side and phone the police."

"Yes, somebody'd better." Grandma was sitting in a rocking chair by the window, looking out over the marshlands. Not even a duck was in sight.

Pixy asked, "Why would your cousin choose such a lonely place for her home? There's a resort less than thirty miles down the highway, and Gran and I saw at least a dozen houseboats moored on that lake. It was a real floating community, with a little church and all."

"Well," answered Harold, "personally I wouldn't want to live here all by myself either, but cousin Myra was thoroughly disappointed in people."

"Unhappy love affair?" asked Grandma, concerned. She knew all about those. Hadn't she seven ex-husbands to her credit?

"Oh no. A lottery ticket," said Harold.

"She won in the lotteries?" cried Pixy. "She won? Money?"

"Oh yes."

"How could that make anybody unhappy?" It was beyond the two detectives. They were always short of money. A windfall in the lotteries was a much talked about fantasy, although they hardly ever had the money to spare for a ticket. And now they were told about someone who was unhappy because of winning? In fact, they had been hired by this lucky individual for some reason or other, and she wasn't even here to explain why.

"Tell us more about your cousin," said Grandma.

Harold Bush cleared his throat. "Well, when Myra was told she was the lucky ticket holder—it was almost sixteen years ago—she did all the usual things people do under those circumstances. She jumped up and down, she shrieked, she embraced everybody in sight, and she swore her life would go on as before and the half million dollars wouldn't be touched. Riches would not affect her lifestyle, and she would be a nurse until retirement age."

"But she did eventually quit her job? I mean, if she's anywhere near your age, she could hardly be of retirement age now. How old are you? Fifty?" asked Pixy.

Harold blushed. "Actually I'm forty-two. About Myra. When she decided not to throw her money about having the ball of her life, it sounded awfully virtuous and noble at the time—to her. It didn't sound so good to her friends, neighbors, and co-workers. A struggling, hardworking person does not especially enjoy working side by side with someone so saintly. She was intimidating. And also, envy is hard to keep at bay. So Myra lost all her friends one by one, and work became for her rather unpleasant. In the end she decided to throw it all in and live off her winnings in some quiet place and take up an old hobby of hers, namely writing. My cousin writes beautiful poetry. Had a few things published, in fact."

"And you are her lawyer and are helping her take care of all her money?" Grandma looked suspiciously at the tall hairy man.

"I helped her invest her money, and I used to do her income tax forms," Harold Bush answered coolly. He went to the cupboard once more and took out the whisky bottle. "You want another drink?" But the detectives declined. Harold poured himself a small whisky and downed it in one gulp. "I have a horrible feeling about my cousin," he said darkly.

"Drink won't help you, Bush. Want more coffee?" Grandma felt almost sorry for the man. Had he bamboozled poor Myra out of her dough? Was that why detectives had been called in? He didn't

really look like a crook. A nice shave and haircut and the fellow could be quite handsome. But, of course, in her business she shouldn't trust anybody. She made him one more cup of instant coffee, putting in lots of cream and sugar. He drank it quickly, then got up. He paused in the doorway and asked, "And why, exactly, are you people here at this time?"

Grandma sent a warning glance towards her partner, then said, "Oh, just for a friendly visit."

Harold Bush had taken his boat back across the lake to report his missing cousin. The detectives had watched him leave from the houseboat porch. They had briefly wondered why he had hoisted his aluminum boat up on the roof rack if it had to come off again later. Oh well, things do get stolen. It was a lovely warm evening, but dark clouds were already gathering on the horizon. Rain was forecast.

"Peculiar, him trusting us just like that, Gran. To him we could be anybody. And as her lawyer it sure is strange of him to let us stay on here when his client seems to be missing."

"Yeah, Harold is a little funny," Grandma agreed.

"You think he did her in? Come to think of it, maybe he was hoisting his boat *up* on his station wagon instead of taking it down when we arrived. Can you remember if it was dry or wet?"

"It was dry. What kind of detective are you? It was the very first thing I looked for. But I must admit, this whole case stinks. An envelope with a short typed note and a little, drawn map, plus one hundred dollars in cash, arrives at our office, asking us to come out here as soon as possible. No further explanation at all. We then hop into the car and rush out here, and—no client." Grandma was really ticked off.

"What if Harold murdered her and will now inherit all the money?" said Pixy. "Does Myra have any other relatives?"

"How should I know! Right now I don't even know if there *is* any Myra Bush."

It had started to get dark, and there was still no sign of Harold Bush, the police, or Myra.

"There must be a reason for all this," muttered Grandma. She was getting hungry.

Should they stay on here, or go home? Or perhaps they ought to summon the police themselves? Then again, they had been paid part of a fee and had obligations. Or had they? In the end the

detectives decided that rather than driving back home the seventy-odd miles, they would spend the night on the houseboat. It was raining now, and quite a strong wind had come up. Pixy looked a little pale.

"Don't you dare get seasick!" warned Grandma. "There are some nice pork chops in the fridge, and red cabbage and onions in a bin. I'll just—"

But Pixy didn't hear the last of the sentence, as he had dashed out the back door. He came in five minutes later, still looking a little green but feeling much better.

Next morning the sun shone brightly, and there wasn't a cloud in sight. What there was in sight now were long-legged fishing birds, dragonflies, and mallard ducks. The marsh had come alive, the air was warm and fresh. But there was still no Myra. And Harold hadn't come back, either. Where could the man be? Maybe he'd had an accident? The detectives were puzzled. Pixy took the inflatable boat across the lake, then drove over to the small community. He stopped the car at Lester's place.

"All right if we keep the boat another day?" he asked the old man.

"Keep it as long as you please. Two dollars fifty per day. Caught any fish?"

"No, we're not really on a fishing trip. We're staying on the houseboat on the—"

"Houseboat!" The old man's eyes just about popped out. "You are staying on the houseboat?"

"Yeah, why not? We were invited," Pixy said, surprised. What was the matter with this strange person? Was he really a mental case? Harold had more or less said so.

"You know Myra Bush? Or, for that matter, her cousin Harold Bush?" he asked.

The man shook his head. "There ain't no Myra, and there ain't no Harold," he said.

"What do you mean?" laughed Pixy. "I don't know about the woman, but there sure as hell is a Harold. He was with us on the houseboat yesterday afternoon. Came with his station wagon and aluminum boat to visit his cousin. But Myra wasn't home. Do you have any idea where she might be?"

"I can tell you something," answered Lester. He was fumbling

in his jacket pocket, finally pulling out an old, not very clean pipe and a foil paper pouch of tobacco. Then he went on, trembling a little.

"Station wagon and boat used to be at the bottom of the lake. Got pulled out and towed off to some wrecking place down the highway. Will have been recycled long ago for some smart little sports car, or maybe a new fridge or something. Accident happened fifteen years ago."

"Fifteen years ago!" exclaimed Pixy. "Lester, you and me aren't talking about the same car 'n boat."

"If we're talking about the same Harold and Myra, we're talking about the same car 'n boat, young man."

"Well, where *are* the cousins then?"

"You walk halfway down the next block, turn in at the white gate, and the—"

"But that's a graveyard!" cried Pixy.

"Yeah, it's that all right," cackled the old man. "Harold and Myra have been residents there, bless their souls, for near on fifteen years."

Pixy's skin crawled, and his heart beat like crazy. Grandma! Oh man, he had to rescue her. He jumped into the Volkswagen and tore down the highway, screeched around the corner of the gravel road, and jumped and dipped along the badly kept access road to the lake. He then paddled furiously.

"Gran!" he yelled. "Gran! Are you all right?" Cripes, he had left her all by herself on a haunted houseboat. He hurried up the rope ladder, forgetting to tie up the boat. He ripped open the door, ran into the kitchen—galley?—and saw her lying on the floor.

"Oh God, no!" he cried and knelt down beside her.

"You crazy or something?" Grandma got herself up to a sitting position. "Whatever got into you?"

Pixy jumped up, relieved. "Gran, did you ever give me a scare. I thought you were dead."

"Dead! Pixy, I mightn't be so young any more, but I *do* have a few more years left in me. I was trying to look under the stove. It doesn't work, and I'm trying to locate the electric outlet."

Pixy got himself a glass from the cupboard, but Grandma shook her head.

"Electric water pump doesn't work, either," she said. "And neither does the refrigerator. Try the lights. Maybe there's a power blackout."

"Gran, this boat isn't on electricity. There are no wires strung across the lake, nor from behind through the marshes. Things in this place are either on propane or batteries."

They soon found a compartment behind the bathroom that held a large propane tank. It was empty.

"Well, as I won't be able to cook us anything now, we might as well paddle over and get a bunch of ready foods from the village," said Grandma. "Fridge is just about empty anyway. But first, tell me if you've found out anything about Harold and Myra."

Pixy told her, and Grandma was shocked.

"That's, of course, utterly ridiculous! Old Lester has lost all his marbles. Let's talk to someone else over there," she said.

Another shock awaited the detectives. The boat was gone. It was merrily bobbing up and down in the middle of the lake, and a small white and brown bird was sitting on its stern.

"How could you!" Grandma was almost in tears. "How could you forget to tie up the thing? DO something! Swim out and get it back."

"I will not swim in this lake!"

"And I will not be stranded on this houseboat, with nothing to eat and no lights. Get this whole thing going, if nothing else!"

"I've never driven a houseboat before. I don't want to ground it in the mud."

They were in the middle of a screaming contest when, both at the same time, they spotted old Lester on the shore by the gravel road.

"Lester!" yelled Pixy. "Hey, Lester! Get us another boat, will you please!"

The old man didn't move, just stood there, smoking his pipe. The detectives waved their arms and hollered, but to no avail. Finally the old man cleaned out his pipe and stuck it in his pocket.

"Please, Lester, call somebody else, then. Call the police," Grandma pleaded.

Lester laughed out loud, then yelled back, "Don't get so excited! You ain't even here! Harold and Myra ain't here, neither. This Ol' Creepy Lake with a haunted houseboat is no place for the living. There just ain't nobody on it!" And with that he turned and walked away.

Grandma and Pixy had heard every word the old man had said, but still they just could not believe their ears.

In the end Pixy stripped down to his boxer shorts—Grandma

promised to stay inside the houseboat and not look out the windows—and took a large lifesaver ring from its hooks. Sitting in it, he paddled with his hands over to the inflatable boat on the lake.

Later, at the small village general store, they bought a loaf of bread, butter, baloney, cheese, and apples. The proprietors, a rather sour middle-aged couple, told them that Myra and Harold Bush had indeed driven their car into Creepy Lake about fifteen years ago. They had drowned. And who lived on the houseboat now? Well, as far as they knew, nobody. The marshes, and that horrible partly-overgrown lake, were a place to be avoided. Not many folks lived around here any more, anyhow. Young people, a selfish lot nowadays, usually left this area as soon as they were out of school, looking for excitement in the big cities.

"Only the likes of that unpleasant old Lester left. And he's a crook, that one," said the woman darkly. "Our whole community is going to the dogs." Her husband only sighed.

Afterwards Grandma and Pixy sat for quite a while in their Volkswagen, debating whether they should go back to the lake at all, or maybe drive home.

"There's the hundred dollars," said Pixy. "We don't have anybody to give it back to."

"Give it back? Never! After all the trouble we've been through since yesterday afternoon, it is a very small wage. If only we knew who that Harold Bush was who was with us on the houseboat. We must try to find out, Pixy."

"You think he might have been dead, Gran?"

"Pixy!" Would her partner ever get ghosts out of his head?

They did go back to the houseboat. They also did what should already have been done much earlier. Grandma found a pair of black gum boots in the bottom of a storage cupboard, and Pixy found a pair of ladies' hiking boots. His small feet didn't fill even them out, so he borrowed a pair of thick woolen socks as well. Then the detectives climbed down the rope ladder once more and took the inflatable boat along the shore and up the little stream. Here they found a dry strip of land, and they pulled it up. The marshlands weren't as bad to walk on, sometimes jumping from dry spot to dry spot, as they had seemed from the lake. In fact, Grandma and Pixy quite enjoyed themselves. A duck family was swimming in a shallow pool. They weren't especially shy, and Grandma stopped and talked to them.

"Hi, cuties! Hello, little darlings! Quack, quack, quack."

It sounded awfully stupid to Pixy, but the ducks loved it. Most animals loved Grandma.

They came to a thick clump of rushes, poked among them with a stick, came to larger stretches of nothing but sand and little rocks, the odd cottonwood tree, and many little streams and puddles. But there was no sign of any human being.

"Yet the houseboat was clean. No dust," pondered Grandma. "There were fresh pork chops in the fridge, flowers and vegetables growing in boxes on the porch. There was still some propane gas in the tank when we arrived. Pixy, someone lives on it all right. But *who*?"

"I'd suggest we go to the police. This is just too strange, Gran. Thing is, they don't like private eyes like us." Pixy sighed, then went on, "Otherwise, the weather is nice, and we have nothing else to do back at the office, with business being so lousy. So why don't we stay for one more day? The way I see it, anybody who puts one hundred bucks into an envelope and throws it in the mail can't be too poor. Might be plenty more where it came from."

"The person might be a criminal," said Grandma.

"Yeah, that, of course, too."

"What will we do for lights on the houseboat tonight, Pixy?" She tried to keep a straight face.

"Oh heck, I'd forgotten. Come to think of it, maybe we *should* drive home tonight. Who knows, maybe that mysterious person will contact us there. Here there's obviously nobody around anyway. We're just wasting time."

So they went back to the houseboat, and Grandma made sandwiches and coffee while Pixy sat on the kitchen counter and dangled his feet.

"You get to wash the dishes!" grinned Grandma.

"Oh drat!" They were in pretty good spirits, and there was nobody else around, watching them drink stuff they usually didn't touch much.

It was quite dark when they finally found themselves on the opposite shore of the lake, tying the boat to the Volkswagen's roof rack. They took one more look at the houseboat—and forgot to close their mouths. For there, on the houseboat, right through the kitchen window, shone a bright light. And as they watched, fascinated—neither spoke a word—the light moved over to the sitting room window. It flickered, then went out.

It was a dumb thing to say, but Grandma said it anyhow.

"There is someone on the boat."

"Or *something!*" whispered Pixy. And for once Grandma didn't argue about nonexistent supernatural beings. Ghosts.

They decided to drive back home anyhow—they were next-door neighbors—and return by daylight.

Grandma had borrowed a lightweight fiberglass boat with a small three and a half horsepower outboard motor from one of her ex-stepsons. And instead of being the bumbling, stumbling comedy characters of the previous two days, Grandma and Pixy became serious and able detectives once again.

When they went down to the lake, a surprise awaited them, for Harold Bush's grey station wagon was parked under a large cottonwood tree, and they saw his shiny aluminum boat tied to the side of the houseboat.

"1979!" cried Pixy happily.

"You nuts or something?"

"No, Gran. But look at Harold's—or whoever he is—car. It's a 1979 model. Only four years old."

So they took their boat to the houseboat, tipped the outboard motor upwards, and loudly announced their arrival. But nobody came on deck to greet them.

"Now what!" snorted Grandma angrily.

The detectives opened the front door without knocking, and collided into each other stepping back again. The floating house was in shambles. Cupboard drawers were open, their contents strewn all over the place. Pictures were ripped off the walls; sofa and chair upholstery was slashed and the stuffing thrown across the room like grey snow. In the kitchen even the stove and refrigerator were pulled out; dishes were smashed on the floor; flour, sugar, and stuff like that were poured all around. The air conditioning unit from the window had been unscrewed and thrown on top of the other mess. The bathroom didn't look much better, but when they came to the bedroom, they were almost surprised. It wasn't too damaged. The mattress was half off the bed, but it hadn't been slashed. Instead, the panelling had been attacked. Two panels had been forced off the wall, and a third one hung, lopsided, from a couple of nails.

"What the hell!" cried Pixy.

"No ghost did *this*," said Grandma, and her partner had to agree.

This was plain vandalism, a trait unique to living humans.

They pushed some of the mess to the side and opened the back door. Where could that Harold be? Had he done all this? Was he hiding out in the marshlands now? It would be a particularly stupid thing to do, though, when all the detectives had to do was take away his boat and call the police. There was really no way out of there.

But they didn't have to look very long for the missing man. First they noticed a flock of water fowl flapping through the air, and then they saw a stumbling Harold splash through a puddle, holding his head with both hands. Blood was dripping through his fingers.

Grandma grabbed a towel off the floor and hurried down the back door rope ladder, jumped the short distance to the soggy shore, and reached poor Harold just as he was keeling forwards. She held out her big strong arms and caught him, supporting him over her shoulder like a tall, skinny reed. Automatically she patted his back. "Now, now. Take it easy, Harold." Then she hollered loudly, "Pixy! Pixy, give me a hand with this guy!"

They cleared the damaged sofa, put some of the stuffing back into it, covered it all with a blanket, and put Harold on top. He was a pathetic sight, still out cold, with the towel around his bleeding forehead. Part of his long legs were hanging out into space over the edge of the sofa. The gash wasn't all that bad, but Grandma had to hold a stainless steel spoon to the big lump on top of his head, as there was no ice to cool it in the now defunct refrigerator.

"Take the boat to our car and get your cordless shaver, Pixy. And could you just pass me the kitchen shears from behind the cracked crock," said Grandma.

"Gran! You aren't!"

"Oh yes, I am," she answered sweetly.

Harold moaned once in a while but was otherwise sleeping quite peacefully. He smelt a little like whisky, and they knew darned well he had reinforced himself from the bottle before venturing out.

Grandma and Pixy soon restored the houseboat to fairly good order. They agreed that, on the whole, the only explanation for all this confusion was that Harold had come back here to look for his cousin's money. Would it be here? She *had* been rich and all alone. Harold had said so. Had she come back and he had killed her? So where was her body? No, they would have to wait for an explanation of the vandalism till Harold woke up.

The other two, Harold and Myra in the graveyard, had nothing at all to do with their present case. Grandma and Pixy made believe they believed it. They also didn't mention the mysterious light on the houseboat last night.

Before long, they heard a horrible sound from the sitting room. It was kind of a muffled shriek, followed by a deep grumbling ending in a very nasty curse word. The kitchen door burst open, and there stood—eyes ablaze—a very handsome, clean-shaven man with a sort of funny short haircut. He opened his mouth and said that nasty word again. Then he burst into tears. It was hard to say which was more awful, the bad language or a tall middle-aged man acting like a baby.

"Sit down, Harold. Calm down, man. Tell us why you're so upset." Pixy shouldn't have said that, for Harold practically flew at the little man, and if Grandma hadn't quickly stepped between the two, goodness knows what would have happened to her partner.

"My hair!" screamed Harold. "Where are my hair and my beard!" He growled like a tiger, but Grandma took his arm and pulled him into the sitting room. He was so mad, he didn't notice her pushing the heap of locks with the tip of her shoe under the couch. She then remembered a little trick one of her ex-grandsons had used when in trouble with his parents, and she tried it now. She looked at her feet, shuffled them a bit, pulled a very pathetic face, and sniffled.

"It wasn't our fault! It wasn't our fault you had an accident in the marshes. You were bleeding horribly; you were fainting, and—" Here Grandma looked up to see how her act was being received. Harold seemed to be listening, at least, so she sniffled once more for good measure, then finished quickly.

"— and we had the worst scare in years. Thought you had been murdered. So —" she raised her hands, palms up, shrugging her shoulders, "— the hair and the beard had to come off so we could see the damage. You do look rather handsome like this, you know." Oh dear, she was certainly happy the bathroom mirror had been broken, for if Harold found out about the almost bald patch in the back, and the hair shorter over one ear than the other, a possible double murder might occur. Oh dear! So she changed the subject.

"Did you make all this mess? Wrecking the whole place?" she asked.

"Of course not. It was all smashed when I arrived. Man, do I ever have a headache!" And he put his head in his hands.

"Why didn't you come back the other day?" asked Pixy. "You went over to get the police while we were waiting here. We spent all night on the houseboat, and nobody came. Next day we were told you and your cousin were dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, dead and buried. Had been for fifteen years. So we stayed on a little longer, trying to find out who the heck *you* were. And no, of course we didn't believe you were dead. Just thought you weren't who you said you were." Here Pixy glanced at his partner, but Grandma didn't even look sarcastic. So he went on.

"We thought you were some sort of impostor. What else could we think? Then in the evening, when we were already by our car, we suddenly saw lights on the houseboat. So we came back today, with a real boat and motor, and we find you all banged up and out cold."

Harold groaned. "Well, I'm truly sorry I didn't get back here. I drove straight back to my motel, you know. I then tried to phone my cousin's New York number, but some man answered and told me that Myra Bush let him sublet the apartment when she left for an extended holiday. She hadn't told him where she was going, but of course we know that she's coming here." Harold moaned again and put his head back in his hands. "I shouldn't have gone to that bar last night."

"Bar!" cried Grandma. "You went and got drunk? How could you? You were supposed to talk to the police!"

"I know. But last night they were busy with a nasty road accident, so I didn't want to bother them," Harold said dully. "And this morning I decided to first try to talk to my cousin. But when I came here, everything was wrecked, and I thought that something horrible had happened to poor Myra. It was a terrible shock. So I started to look all around here under the ruins. Everywhere. Then I took a little drink for the nerves and rushed out into the damn marshland. Hell of a place! Just behind that cluster of reeds over there to the right, I got stuck with one foot in some quicksand, and then when I finally got clear of it, I slipped on the slimy rocks surrounding the pit. And that's really all I remember."

Here Grandma broke in. "You'll live! But we still don't know about your cousin, and why she hired us detectives—"

"Detectives!" said Harold surprised.

"Well, who else did you think we were? You think we're just here for fun? This isn't exactly Disneyland, you know. No, we are

on a job. Got a typewritten note the other day, with a little cash, not very much, and were requested to rush out here to meet Myra Bush. But, as you can see, she hasn't shown up yet, and we still haven't been told why she wanted us here."

"That is a mystery all right. Detectives, huh? May I see your license?"

They showed it to him, and he nodded. "Washington state. That's okay, then."

"I've been thinking," said Pixy. "Does Myra perhaps have another residence besides this one here?"

"Not any more. She did move a bit around after she had decided that writing wasn't her thing after all. She settled finally in New York, in Greenwich Village. Has been living there for almost sixteen years."

"She's been away for sixteen years!?" cried Grandma and Pixy.

"Well, yes. Didn't you know?"

"We only know that fifteen years ago two people drowned in this lake. They are buried in the local graveyard," said Grandma. "So who are they?"

"They sure as hell aren't Myra and me. She and I might have had our differences over the investment of her money—she fired me as her lawyer—but otherwise we've been in touch all these years by telephone and letters. She told me several times how lucky she had been to have such wonderful tenants, the entomologist couple, and—"

"She'd rented the houseboat out? Well, no wonder it was in such good shape," said Grandma.

"Oh yes, lovely people they were, too. I met them when they first moved here. Unfortunately I didn't bother with them after that, seeing that Myra collected the rent by mail. There was no reason for me and my wife to come out here."

The towel slipped off Harold's head, and the gash in his forehead had stopped bleeding. The blood had congealed, and the wound didn't look too bad now. He felt the bump on top of his head and winced. He then started to feel the short hair, and Grandma said quickly, "What you just told us is this: Myra only lived here for a few months, then she moved to New York. She rented this place to a couple of entomologists. And you and she argued over her investments. Why? You cheat her out of some money?"

"I did not!" screamed Harold, jumping up. "I'll tell you what that foolish woman did, though. Took all her money out of her banks

and trust companies, cashed in the bonds, and said she was going somewhere to Find Herself. Like Greenwich Village. The woman went crazy in the head, that's what happened." He sat down again. "I'm rehired now. My cousin finally smartened up."

"Well," said Pixy, "This seems now a proper case for the police, doesn't it? For if you and your cousin are still alive, then the two graves in the graveyard can't belong to you, can they? So, if the villagers fished out and buried two bodies of houseboat tenants, it must have been the entomologists. Right?"

"Yeah, it must have been them. Has nothing to do with us, though." Grandma shrugged indifferently. "So there's no real need actually to involve the cops."

"I'll report the vandalism, though," said Harold.

"Do you have to?" asked Grandma.

Both Pixy and Harold looked at the woman, surprised.

"Whatever for shouldn't I?" asked Harold. "Can't have crazy people come to someone's home and smash everything. I'll tell you what we'll do. You leave me your phone number and then go back home. I know my cousin will show up eventually. I don't know why she wants to hire you, but I'm sure it wasn't quite as urgent as she wrote it would be."

"Which means our case is finished for the time being?" asked Pixy.

"I guess so. Just send your bill to my office and—"

"Let's save time and make out the bill right now. Being Miss Bush's lawyer, you will be authorized to give us a check for the remaining fees." Grandma was, as usual, in charge of collecting. Pixy would be stuck with the paperwork back at the office. He sighed.

“Why didn't you want the vandalism reported, Gran?" Pixy asked later.

"You'll find out. I have a hunch. Let's drive over to old Lester's house."

They found him digging with his bare hands in a wooden box filled with muck.

"Big order of worms for a fishing party. A dozen businessmen coming up here to that little fishin' hole on the left," he grinned. "Can I help you folks?"

"No, you cannot, Lester. You have already done enough! But thanks for helping us earn a nice little wage and a couple of days

on the lake," said Grandma. "And by the way, the pork chops and red cabbage were delicious."

"Don't know what you're talking about." The old man straightened up, eyeing the detectives carefully, then turned around and started to dig into the worms again.

"Like hell you don't!" Grandma put her hands on her hips. "Come on, tell us the truth. Our lips will stay sealed, and we'll be damned if we ever return to this forsaken place. So—admit it. You've had a nice private fishing spot for the past fifteen years, haven't you, Lester? Scaring everybody away from that place with your absurd ghost stories, huh? Going there in the evenings with a quiet little lightweight boat. Is it the green one over there by the garage? Anyhow, Lester, it's a dog eat dog world—and you did pay the rent—but you didn't have to smash all the furniture when you found out that Myra Bush was coming back. Find any money behind the wall panels?"

The old man stopped digging and looked back over his shoulder.

"Heck no! What kind of question is that? Wasn't anything in that place," he snarled.

Heck yes! Both Grandma and Pixy were sure Myra had left at least a little something hidden in her houseboat. Nobody lugs off all of half a million in cash to Find Themselves in New York. And what about the wall panelling in the houseboat bedroom? Why stop vandalizing that room at the third panel? Oh yes, Lester knew a few things all right. He also knew who the unfortunate drowning victims really were in the graveyard. Smart man, keeping quiet about them all these years.

"You by chance related to the general store owners?" asked Grandma.

"Yeah, I am that." Lester looked a little scared. "That fellow, George, is my son. Nice person. Not like that miserable wife of his. I never could stand the sight of that witch—and vice versa. Had a horrible fight with her last week."

So now they also knew who had sent for the detectives—and Harold Bush. It was such a nasty hoax, it was almost funny. What a nice family!

"They must have known about your using the entomologists' names for paying the rent. How did you pull that off, anyhow? You must have paid by money order, huh?"

The old man just stood glaring at the detectives.

"And now," Grandma went on, "we have to get one thing clear.

You can either repair all the damage you have done to the houseboat—and return Miss Bush's money—or we'll have a little talk with the police."

Lester threw a handful of worms at them.

They were driving home, Pixy at the wheel, when he remarked, "I wonder why Lester waited all this time to look for the money."

"Oh," said Grandma, "he probably didn't have quite the courage, or perhaps the inclination, to right out steal anything. He had a good thing going for himself all these years. Had his own house with a little business *and* a private lake and houseboat. But then, when suddenly, without warning, his little world came crashing down, poor Lester became resentful. Acted irrational. In a way, I feel a little sorry for the old man."

They drove a few more miles in silence. Pixy suddenly grinned. "You know, Gran, I hate to say this, but do you realize who paid for our little adventure? I sure hope Harold won't get in too much trouble when his cousin finds out he paid us for something she hadn't even hired us for."

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Evelyn's Album

by Terrence Rafferty



Illustration by Ken Borroughs

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For six months after Evelyn died, I did everything I could not to think of her. I put all the pictures away, I kept her closets closed, and I started sleeping in the guest room, in a single bed, so it would feel less like something was missing. But I didn't sell the house: I liked it too much, waking up to the bright Florida sun and going to sleep to the sound of the waves. And one night, I don't know why, I just walked into our bedroom and lay down on our bed and dreamed of Evelyn, and when I woke up I wasn't a guest in my own house any more. So I stepped outside in the blazing light and walked—as I hadn't for half a year—our usual walk, wondering why I'd thought I could forget her, after almost forty years together. Maybe what I'd wanted to forget was just her last two months of suffering and my own grim visiting-hours routine, steeling myself each day against the sound of her screaming, the sight of her eroding flesh. Maybe I just wanted to erase the awful memory of her last words to me: "There's nothing more to say, is there, Jack? It's all in the album now."

That day, though, with the sun reflecting brilliantly off the water and the sand, it was as if the chill had been taken off those final words, and I felt that Evelyn—as usual—was showing me the way. I couldn't get the sound of her voice back, just the way it was, and words fade quickly from an old man's mind; but images have a stronger life, and all the photos I'd packed away for fear that they'd torment me could be a comfort—the pictures that will always be *exactly* Evelyn, the pictures she still lives in.

So that night I opened up the closet and took down Evelyn's album, the one that she'd been keeping since before she knew me. I was still, I think, a little scared of what I might begin to feel again: I carried the album back out to the living room and kept the TV on. And I didn't close the drapes across the glass doors to the porch; although the glass only reflected the room right back to me, it made me feel less sealed off from the world. I could hear the regular breaking of the waves out there, and the palms crackling softly in the breeze, and a dog barking somewhere down the beach. I opened the thick book to its first page, where a strong hand had written: "To Evelyn on her twentieth birthday, May 21, 1944. Papa." No "my dearest daughter," no "with much love." But he had, at least, signed "Papa"—a man who surely thought of himself only as "Henry Preston Wills"—and maybe that had been enough for Evelyn. The photos were artfully arranged, the dates and captions scrupulously exact and lettered in a careful hand. The

people in these pictures seemed transformed by Evelyn's care, happier and more substantial, as if they only came fully to life under her loving attention. As if they only really *lived* in this album.

But there were no people at all in the first few pages. They were filled with pictures—taken from every angle, outside and inside—of Wills Court, the huge, ornate mansion in southern Massachusetts where Evelyn grew up. I flipped past an aerial view of the lush estate and its U-shaped mansion that looked imposing even from the air; past the shots of the courtyard fountain with its silly carved figures along the edge; past the curved driveway and the line of gleaming cars in front of the steps; past the marbled entrance hall, hung with portraits; past the dining rooms and ballrooms, all buffed and chandeliered, draped and portraited on a grandiose scale. It seemed impossible that anyone had ever strolled through these rooms in a bathrobe and bare feet, or flopped in an armchair, looked out the window and said, "This is my home." But this had been Evelyn's home for the first twenty-two years of her life, and even in this depopulated palace I found traces of her. I could pick out her bedroom—north wing, second floor—and I imagined her standing at her window when the photo was being taken, looking out at the tripod-mounted camera that wasn't quite sensitive enough to record her presence. And she was there, too, in the portrait on the far wall of the dining room, a darkhaired, serious child of, say, eight, in a white dress made more brilliant by the light from the tall windows. It was the way she'd looked almost fifty years later, standing in her white terry beach robe, looking out these glass doors into the mid-morning sun, the radiance she'd carried with her even through her first weeks in the hospital, when she could still sit by the window in her white gown.

And I almost gave it up right then, when the pain began to force its way back in. I switched off the reading lamp and looked up from the album, determined to clear my mind of memories. But the world I looked up to, my living room in Florida, was suddenly dim and indistinct, lit now only by the weak light of the television and blurred by my tears, and all the sounds—the laugh track, the wind in the palms, the waves, the distant dog—merging in one faint hum, and nothing but darkness coming through the glass. I sat there, in this chaos of dull sensation, until I couldn't bear it any more and turned the light back on and opened the album. These pictures of Evelyn were something clear; *this* pain, at least, was sharp, precise, and real.

I didn't linger long over the next group of photos, mostly shots of Henry Wills striking powerful-man poses or laughing "candidly" with his political cronies in dinner jackets. I'd met Evelyn's father when he was nearly sixty and serving the last of his many terms as state senator, and I'd never liked him. The oldest pictures of him here looked all wrong to me; his face as a young man seemed undefined, uncomfortable under his dark hats, as if it were just waiting to grow into the bald, imperious, narrow-eyed face of his fifties.

Eleanor, his tall, gentle wife, was photographed with their children, Evelyn and Bobby. Evelyn, even at age three, looked extraordinarily like her mother. They had the same wide, penetrating eyes: but Evelyn's looked too intelligent for a child, and Eleanor's looked too open, too vulnerable for an adult. The grouping was always the same in these pictures—Eleanor in the middle, between her two children—but the similarity of mother and daughter, their dark eyes staring straight into the camera, destroyed the balance of the shots: Evelyn and her mother were a unit, and blue-eyed Bobby was off to the side somewhere, an afterthought. I'd looked at these pictures a hundred times before and never noticed Bobby much, partly because his presence in them was so weak, and partly, I suppose, because I'd never met him: these views of him as a child had no resonance for me. I met Evelyn in 1944, not long after Bobby disappeared, gone AWOL from the army, and after the first month or two, when the family was still wondering if he'd turn up again, Evelyn rarely spoke of him. Or she spoke of him in the past tense, painfully, as if he'd died in the war with all the other young men.

But that night, alone in my living room, I looked hard at Bobby, perhaps because I'd always thought of him as dead, and now everyone in these pictures, even Evelyn, was dead, and Bobby seemed more a part of them that way. Perhaps because I knew he might still be alive, alone somewhere, like me. In any event, he was Evelyn's brother, a part of her life for eighteen years before he walked out of it forever, and I felt, that night, that I wanted to know *everything* about Evelyn, to know her before I knew her, to see everything as her dark eyes saw it.

I wondered if Evelyn as a child had sensed the misery that came across so clearly in these pictures of her brother. His unhappiness looked like it had an edge on it. Bobby never smiled; he always looked away from the photographer, staring to the side defiantly,

as if marking the exact place outside the frame where he'd rather be. His big ears, sticking almost straight out from his head, should have softened the impression, made him look more the shy, awkward boy, but somehow they had the opposite effect: Bobby seemed all miserable, reckless anger, and I wondered if he'd ever turned his rage on Evelyn. But in the only unposed picture of the children at play, it's Evelyn who's the pursuer; Bobby the pursued. They're playing some sort of hide-and-seek at the edge of the woods behind the house, and the camera catches Evelyn, in a white dress, running gleefully toward the huge oak Bobby's hiding behind. His face is cold, furious, as if he'd expected to hide forever there and never be found. As if he wanted only to be left alone, behind the oak, huddled in his solitary rage.

When I came to the last picture of Bobby, big-eared and unsmiling in his army uniform, I closed the book again. Everything around me seemed to have gotten louder. On TV, the canned laughter of the early-evening comedies had given way to the gunshots and screeching tires of a cop show. The wind sounded twice as strong as it had before, strong enough to have its own sound now, above the whipping of the palms. The dog on the beach seemed closer, too, and its bark had become more frenzied, angrier. And the soft, steady crash of ocean seemed to have altered its rhythm: the waves were beating a faster, more erratic time, a tempo I couldn't quite grasp. I sat there with my eyes closed, half hoping that I'd sleep, but the images kept finding me, Evelyn in a white dress, running toward me, finding me wherever I hid.

The next bunch of photos were the ones I dreaded: Henry Wills's sixtieth birthday party, Wills Court, December 3, 1944. I'd been there, among the hundred or so guests in the ballroom that night. It was, for Henry Wills, a fairly intimate gathering: just family and a few "friends"—that is, the men he most needed favors from. I wasn't quite sure what I was doing there. It didn't occur to me at the time, but as I looked at the pictures in Evelyn's album, I wondered if I'd been chosen to stand in for Bobby at that party, to fill in the picture of the missing son. Maybe Bobby had felt all his life the way I felt that night: awed, nervous, unproved—as if my place in the family picture were yet to be determined.

Dress was "informal," so I wore my best suit and a brand-new tie. There are no photographs of my arrival at the party; Evelyn and her mother may have been the only people who noticed me

when I came through the huge front entrance. They both wore white that night, like brides, and when Evelyn took my arm at the front door and led me down the hall, it felt strangely like a wedding to me. The pictures reminded me of how lovely she'd looked, in her ruffled, high-necked dress with a little bow at the collar, a dress that might have seemed too girlish on someone else. On Evelyn, it was perfect because of the effortless continuity of her personality: at eight, at twenty, at sixty, she seemed always to present the same face to the world. In the pictures of her dancing with her father, she's the image of strong, sure movement, her skirt flaring in one picture, wrapping lightly around her legs in the next. Henry looks stiff, almost confused, as if overwhelmed by his daughter's vivacious confidence. I didn't learn until months later how bad his heart was; Evelyn and her mother were the only ones who knew, that night.

The pictures of Evelyn and her father dancing are the most striking in the series, but there are twenty more photos following them. I'd sometimes wondered why Evelyn had kept so many: most of them were dull shots of middle-aged couples dancing and laughing and standing around with champagne glasses in their hands, poorly composed group shots in which the heads in the foreground blocked out the heads in the background, in which backs were turned to the camera and faces were obscured in shadows. I usually flipped right past all the rest of the party pictures, but this time I was seeing everything in a different light and these crowded, messy photos had a particular fascination for me: I had to *look* for Evelyn in them. Finding those flashes of white dress or dark hair in the crowd took all my concentration, and I felt a surprising satisfaction—almost happiness—when I managed to pick her out.

That was how I came across the picture, the one I've been explaining to myself ever since. It was an ordinary crowd shot, dancers in the foreground and in the background the huge french windows that opened onto the patio and that, during the day, gave a beautiful view of the woods behind the house. At night, the windows were just a black background, and Evelyn's white dress stood out sharply against it. Her back was to the camera, but she was unmistakable—the way she held her head, and the white that seemed more dazzling on her than on anyone else—and the first thing I noticed was that she wasn't dancing with anyone, or talking with anyone, but seemed to be looking straight through the windows at the darkness outside. I wondered, at first, if she'd taken

this moment to catch her breath, to reflect on this strange evening—on her father, on Bobby's absence, on my presence—I tried to see the darkness through her eyes. And suddenly I saw it, what Evelyn saw, not just darkness. I saw a faint white outline outside the french windows, the outline of a face. I saw—I thought I saw—two large ears sticking straight out from that face. I saw Bobby in that picture, his face seeming to float in the darkness, looking at Evelyn. I saw Evelyn looking right at her missing brother through the glass.

It was getting harder to ignore the dog. He sounded very close—not more than a couple of hundred yards down the beach—but when I got up to look outside, I still couldn't see him. Standing right in front of the glass doors, too close even to see my own reflection, all I could make out were the white crests of the waves, breaking furiously now, pale ragged lines rising from the dark ocean, dissolving back into that darkness as they moved towards me. Maybe the wind—which seemed to have doubled again in strength—was carrying that insane barking right to my door. There was no moonlight that night. I couldn't see a single star. Maybe a storm was coming up. I looked back towards the TV: a talk show, more loud laughter, the news was over. Maybe that wasn't Bobby in the picture. Maybe Evelyn hadn't seen a thing.

I knew there was a magnifying glass somewhere in the house, and after a few minutes of rummaging in the desk I found it. When I held it up to the face in the picture, it didn't show a great deal more detail, but it showed enough. I could see a thin mustache, which no other picture of Bobby had ever shown; I could see that the man in the picture had worn a hat, though its shape was indistinguishable in the darkness. But the shape of the face and the defiant angle of the head were distinctly Bobby's. And it was clear, in the magnified image, that the man was looking straight at Evelyn and she at him, and she must have recognized him: there would have been a fuss if she'd seen a stranger lurking on the patio. I didn't understand it. Evelyn had always told me that the last time she saw her brother was in February, 1944, two months before he went AWOL; she couldn't have *forgotten* that he turned up at that party, after he'd been missing for eight months. She must have lied about it, then, and I couldn't figure out why.

Had she gone outside to meet him? She must have: I scanned the next ten pictures and found no trace of her. I remembered, too, that I'd lost track of her that night, for how long I don't know—maybe

an hour, maybe more. And I remembered that I'd needed her familiar, sympathetic face in the chaos of that party, and for a long time I hadn't been able to find it. Her mother said that Evelyn must have gone upstairs to get something from her bedroom; but I'd kept looking for her, and it seemed like ages before she reappeared. I could understand why she'd want to slip out quietly: her brother was, after all, a fugitive—and a political embarrassment to their ailing father, now smiling and nodding and whispering in favored ears at his sixtieth birthday party. But why would she maintain for almost forty years the fiction that February, 1944, was the very last time she'd seen Bobby Wills? Even if their meeting outside had been a nasty one—as I was sure, somehow, it had been—there was no one, now, who could be hurt by the knowledge. I used the magnifying glass to study each of the next ten pictures, looking for Evelyn's white dress in the crowd, and managed to spot almost everyone who'd been at Wills Court that night; I was even in a couple of them. But Evelyn was in none of them. She'd seen her brother Bobby, she'd gone outside to meet him, and then she'd kept it a secret for the rest of her life.

I had the sense, for a moment, that I shouldn't go on with this: these mute images—what they told me and, most of all, what they didn't tell me—could drive me crazy. I wasn't quite focusing now, but the images kept swimming in front of my eyes: Bobby's ghostly face; Evelyn's rigid back, her arms pinned to her sides, the pleats of her white dress perfectly straight; the dancing, laughing couples. And the laughing couples in picture after picture without her, the black windows behind them, and beyond the windows—what the camera couldn't catch, the images I couldn't keep myself from seeing, absurd images: Bobby in his uniform, rifle slung over his shoulder, hiding behind the big oak at the edge of the woods, and Evelyn running toward him, her white dress flaring recklessly in the cold night air. The black windows were in every picture, a blank screen for my imagining, and I felt alone, alone as I'd felt on that night in 1944, waiting for Evelyn to appear again among the laughing guests. Suddenly the music and laughter coming from the TV seemed to merge with my memories of that night, like a dull echo of the joy that didn't include me then, and didn't now.

I couldn't remember the exact moment when Evelyn entered the ballroom, and the album doesn't show it, either. Just as it seemed to me that night, she's simply *there* again, as if she'd never left. I don't remember asking her where she'd gone—but now I *knew*

why she'd disappeared for so long, and I examined the remaining pictures of her for the effects of her talk with Bobby. Even with all the imagination that had been stirred up in me, though, I couldn't find a real clue to her feelings. She looked just the same: radiant and in command. Her hair, I thought, looked a trifle wilder, a few strands dangling free of her careful arrangement. But then, this was near the end of the evening, at that stage of the party when everyone begins to look a little rumpled, the perfect veneers worn down by booze and sweat and laughter, when even the freshest dresses have begun to wrinkle and droop. Evelyn, in fact, showed fewer marks of wear than the other guests; her dress looked as crisp and new as it had in the earliest photos. But then I noticed why. It was a different dress.

It was white, like the other one, but the bow at the collar was missing, and the sleeves looked fuller here. Evelyn had definitely changed her dress and, as I looked more closely, I saw that she'd changed her shoes as well. And had she been wearing gloves in the earlier pictures? I flipped back; she hadn't. The gloves could be explained: she might have put them on to go outside and just forgotten to take them off. But the dress and the shoes didn't make any sense. It was, I remembered, a cold dry night, and the ground was rock-hard: she couldn't have got herself very muddy even if she'd fallen—or been pushed—while she was outside talking to Bobby. And if . . . Why didn't the pictures tell me more? I was sick of asking questions, sick of trying to remember a winter night in 1944, sick of searching for *clues* with a magnifying glass, clues to a woman I'd known better than anyone else in the world for nearly forty years. I didn't even know what I was looking for. Why hadn't *Evelyn* told me more? For the first time since she died, I began to cry. The rain had finally begun. The howling dog was right outside.

I pounded the album up and down on my knees. I felt like breaking this book of pictures, this careful arrangement that told me nothing, that left everything more to say. I cried out her name, almost screamed it, and as I lowered my head I thought I heard my cry echoing all around me. But it was the whine of the test pattern on TV, and the howling of the dog out in the rain. The piercing, insistent sounds seemed to go right through me, like a chill that can't be shaken off, and I rocked back and forth in my chair, back and forth for I don't know how long, until I became aware of something new, a scraping noise that sounded very close, and suddenly I was afraid. I looked up, blinking, trying to see

through the film of tears, and gradually I made out a moving shape outside the glass doors—a huge black dog jumping up at the sliding screen outside the glass, standing on his hind legs and scratching furiously at the screen. I screamed at him to go away, but he kept on howling and jumping and scraping. I got up and pounded my fist against the glass, over and over, and he wouldn't go away, and I pounded harder and faster and still he scratched and howled, his face nearly level with mine when he jumped up. I saw a panic in his eyes, and a vicious determination to get inside, a desire so fierce he would have ripped the house down if he could. We were face to face—he scratching and howling, I pounding and crying, the rain sweeping across the patio in great sheets. Even the sound of the ocean was drowned out. I could feel the glass quivering from my blows, but I didn't care, I didn't know what I was doing, and suddenly the door just shattered, raining glass all around me, and then the spray of rain as it blew through the screen. The dog ran off.

I stood there, feeling the water and the wind on my face, looking out at the turbulent ocean, and realized that I wasn't crying any more. There was glass all over the carpet—I even shook some small pieces from my hair and my clothes—but I hadn't hurt myself badly: just a small cut on the hand that had smashed through the door. The rain was washing the blood off anyway, watery red drops dripping from the tips of my fingers onto the carpet. I didn't care. I didn't care what had happened in 1944, or why Evelyn had never told me, I didn't care if I never knew. She was gone now, she'd loved me and I'd loved her, and I supposed I might love what I didn't know about her as well as what I knew. I stood there in our living room and let the rain wash over me, perfectly still as if I were posing for a picture.

I was very calm. Something had gone out of me in the last few minutes, some feeling that I'd used up completely. I turned away from the window and walked back to the TV, flipped the dial idly—nothing but snow and test patterns—and turned it off. The house was so quiet. I picked the album up from the floor. It had fallen open just where I'd left it, at the last of the party pictures, the one in which Evelyn was wearing gloves and a different dress. I turned the page: I'd gone far beyond fearing what I'd find next, and far beyond expecting, or even wanting, to find any answers. But I found the answers anyway.

The next picture was dated "Winter 1946" but facing it on the next page was one labeled "June 1945," and that struck me as strange. I glanced quickly through the rest of the album, which went through 1950—the year Henry Wills died—and it bore out what I suspected: the 1946 picture was the only one out of sequence in the whole album. Evelyn, I knew, had to have placed it there for a reason, and though I didn't expect to find anything out, I turned back to that picture to look at it more carefully. It was a long shot—too long, really, for the faces to be perfectly distinct—of Evelyn and Eleanor standing at the edge of the woods behind the house. Eleanor looks much older in this photo, even at a distance. Evelyn, of course, looks the same as ever, in a white dress with a dark coat over it and no hat; her hair is pinned up, as it had been at the party. Her mother's in the exact center of the picture, with Evelyn on one side and the big oak tree on the other, where Bobby would have been. I remembered the day, because I took the picture. Evelyn and I had been married for almost a year, and one cold December day Evelyn dragged us across the back lawn for this photo. I remembered wondering what the occasion was, but of course there was no occasion: Evelyn seemed to want only this shot, posing herself and her mother carefully next to the old oak, and waving me farther and farther back, to get everything in. The album had dozens of pictures of Evelyn and her mother, but this was the only one of just the two of them, without Bobby. Evelyn had taken us all the way out to the woods, in December, to take only this picture. And then she'd placed it out of sequence in the album. Suddenly I felt that I knew just why she'd put it there. I knew what had happened on the night of Henry's sixtieth birthday party. There was no real evidence—but I knew that Bobby had died that night, and that Evelyn had killed him.

I had nothing to go on but emotional facts, but they were more than enough. I felt, for instance, that I could *prove* that Bobby had turned up that night only to make trouble, prove it by the hatred in his eyes in his childhood pictures, prove it by the timing of his reappearance—of all nights for him to return, this was the most public, the most embarrassing to his family. Evelyn must have rushed outside to try to keep him from bursting in, she must have argued with him, listened to his scorn, tried to convince him, at least, to wait until the guests had all gone home. But how could she have stopped him? By picking up a rock, perhaps, and smashing his head with it, not meaning to kill but, in a sense, not caring,

wanting only to defend herself and her home, to keep her father's heart from collapsing, to drive the intruder away. And then she'd changed the dress and the shoes that were stained by Bobby's blood, pulled gloves on over her hands, where the rock had scraped the skin, and returned to the ballroom. I don't know exactly when she buried the body, but I do know where. She buried it next to the oak tree at the edge of the woods, the tree her mother's standing next to in that 1946 picture, the tree a younger Bobby had huddled behind, hoping not to be found.

For anyone else, I guess, all this would be just a puzzle: trivial oddities, vague suspicions. But when you've known someone as long and well as I knew Evelyn, everything has a meaning. For me, the fact that she never told me about that night could only mean that something terrible had happened. Placing that one photo out of order had a meaning, too: it told me to look closely at that picture, and I'd see Bobby in it. Her last words to me were, "It's all in the album now": she was pointing me toward the story in these pictures, the one story she'd never been able to tell me.

The rain had finally stopped coming through the screen. It was letting up a bit, and the wind had died down to almost nothing. I could hear the waves again, above the soft drumming on the patio and the distant patter on the palms. An act of violence brings a calm after it, a kind of peaceful emptiness. My feelings about Evelyn, I knew, could never be so fierce, so despairing, ever again. I imagine that's how Evelyn felt after she killed her brother—an emptying of her feelings for her family, her home, her childhood, of all the feelings that had exploded in that act of murder. Maybe it had made it easier for her to accept me when I offered, a few months later, to share my life with her. And this night might make it easier for me to accept . . . what? This loneliness, this house that I see now as if from high up in the air, like the first dazzling view of Wills Court in Evelyn's album.

I turned to the end of the album as the sun was beginning to rise. It was Evelyn and me, April 1950, standing in front of the french windows in the ballroom at Wills Court, the woods just visible in the background. We'd come to the house to see Henry before he died. The woods are just visible. The sun was coming up in Florida. By noon, it had dried the wet crescent on the carpet where the rain came in.



Just Another Kidnap by Robert Barnard

The kidnap went badly almost from the first. At five minutes past eleven Arrigo Furlani (manager of the Banco Nazionale Piemontese, and an official in the Rome branch of the Christian Democratic Party) stepped through the portals of the bank's head-

quarters in Via Sparafucile, Rome. He was gesturing angrily with his one free hand (an Italian with a briefcase is a man half-crippled) and sending a rattle of orders and expostulations in the direction of his obsequious underlings in the shadow of those portals.

Illustration by Hank Blaustein

"Presto! Presto! Via!" he concluded, half turning in their direction as he surged ahead, barging through the paths of passers-by. He did not see the dirty blue Fiat parked near his own Mercedes, nor did he heed the presence some yards away of the leather-jacketed young men observing his departure from the corners of their dark eyes.

The capture was the work of a moment. A burst of machine gun fire killed the chauffeur in the Mercedes, and then the young man holding the gun turned around and sprayed the doorway of the Banco Nazionale as a warning. None of the obsequious underlings showed signs of wanting to fight the thing through. Arrigo Furlani found a gag in his mouth and his hands handcuffed behind his back. In the scuffle he dropped his briefcase. In seconds he was shoved into the front seat of the Fiat and the car began to career off eastwards down Via Sparafucile.

It was then that things began to go wrong. As the man who'd bound Furlani tore open the Fiat's back door, a shot rang out from the west end of the street. He fell at once. The two other gunmen looked round as they dived into their own car, and it was the last thing they did. The dirty Fiat swerved on two wheels into Via Mascagni under a hail

of bullets, leaving behind a scene of leaking petrol tanks, broken glass, and spilt blood. Three for one (the chauffeur): it seemed a reasonable proportion. Before long the newspaper boys would be calling it a triumph for the carabinieri.

Mario Galbani, sweating profusely, drove like a maniac up Via Mascagni with one hand on the wheel. In front, around, and behind were other people driving like maniacs with one hand on the wheel. The back door had shut itself during the perilous two-wheel turn into Via Mascagni. There was nothing to differentiate his car from those of other Rome motorists. No one paid any attention to him, or if they did, if they connected him with the gunfire in the distance, they made sure their attention was not too obvious.

"Just another kidnap," said a good Roman citizen to his wife, and edged himself into the farther lane.

Mario's free hand held the gun; it had been poked unnervingly into Arrigo Furlani's side from the moment he was dumped into the passenger seat. Furlani had his eyes open, and was making convulsive movements with his mouth around the gag. Mario kept his foot on the accelerator as they neared the end of Via Mascagni. Left, then right, then right again. They'd drummed it into him so

many times. Why in God's name had he been chosen to drive? He, who'd only been three times in Rome? Because you're too stupid to shoot anyone, they'd replied. Left, on two wheels, with shrieking brakes, into Via Mastromiei, the sweat pouring down his face like Alpine streams in springtime. Left, then right. Right into Viale Corbaccio, keeping with the stream of traffic but ahead of the crowd. Left, then right, then—left again, wasn't it? As he swerved left and saw with horror a tide of advancing traffic, he imagined—surely it must have been imagination?—a muffled voice from the seat beside him:

"Turn right, you idiot."

With a soprano screech of brakes Mario swerved the car around and careering wildly, continued their progress out of Rome.

It was a two and a half hour drive before they would get there, and long before that Mario decided he was going mad with tension and frustration. His gun hand went to sleep. Cautiously he transferred the weapon to his left hand, and drove with his right. As they emerged from the city into the Campagna he stole glances at his companion. The glances were returned—operatically, con-

temptuously. The sun beat down on them. Mario wiped his brow with his free hand, and the Fiat swerved unnervingly towards the ditch. Peremptory cursings came from behind the gag. Mario would have liked to open the window, but he didn't quite dare to let go of the wheel for that long. They careened along at a hundred and thirty, like any Italian family out for a day at the coast. By midday the sun was unbearable. Mario was dying for a drink. Typical of his friends, Mario thought, that they'd spent last night reading *On the Condition of the Working Classes in England*, and hadn't even thought to bring in a few bottles of Coke. Maniacs, he muttered. Then, remembering their possible fate, he crossed himself. The car swerved madly towards the ditch again.

It was nearly three by the time they arrived at the ruined castle of Orvino-Monteverde. Not much of a castle, it had been abandoned not long after the Risorgimento by its family, which was not much of a family either and had later sunk into being pork butchers in a suburb of Naples. Now it was a three story ruin, with collapsed roof, holes for windows, and a ridiculous tower that nobody but a fool would ascend. The road to it was hardly more than a path. But at least Mario's friends had thought to remove the worst of

the boulders. Mario did not slacken speed until he drove into the dusty circle that served as a courtyard. Then he came to a halt in an anguished scream of brakes.

"Get out," he squeaked threateningly, his gun still pointed.

"Mmmm—nnn—ttt—" spluttered Arrigo Furlani.

Mario had to admit he had a point. Furlani's hands were still handcuffed behind him. His gun pointed nervously at the passenger seat, Mario got out, went round the back, and opened the right side door. Almost as if he were Furlani's chauffeur.

"In there," he shouted uncertainly. "Pig."

He waved his gun towards the Grand (and crumbling) Entrance. Stiff with discomfort, Furlani stumbled forward, through the entrance and into the high, dark hall. At least here there was some shade from the appalling sun.

"Up!" shouted Mario, his voice having now sunk to its usual tenor. "Up, capitalist leech!"

Furlani looked at the rickety stairs and turned to expostulate. Mario, his hand trembling, pointed his gun at the banker's substantial gut. Furlani turned and stumbled up the stairs. Straight ahead of them, on the first floor, was a large room, perhaps in palmier days the seignorial bedroom.

"Forward, lackey of bourgeois democracy!" cried Mario, his relief at the end of his ordeal making him a touch more confident. "Sit! On that chair!"

And so their journey ended. The handcuffs were removed, and Mario tied Furlani's chest and shoulders, and afterwards his ankles, to the chair. Then at last he could throw away his gun.

Oh yes, but there was one more thing. The comrades had insisted on it. Mario turned to his captive.

"Comrade Furlani," he proclaimed, his voice going skywards again at the unusualness of the task, "you are a captive of the people and your seizure is a just expression of the anger of the proletariat at their exploitation at the hands of the international fascist-capitalist clique. You will be tried by a people's court, at which you will be allowed every opportunity to speak in your own defense. When you have been found guilty you will be democratically shot. If, however, you repent of your acts of oppression against the working class, and if—if—" What came next?

"If a ransom is paid," came spluttering from behind the gag.

"Yes—and if a ransom is paid, the sum to be decided by an ad hoc general assembly, you may after a period of political re-education be regarded as having

served exemplary punishment, and you will, subject to certain conditions, be set free."

Mario finished and wiped his brow.

"Bravo!" said the muffled voice.

"What," asked Arrigo Furlani, "are we waiting for?"

His gag had been removed because Mario was tired of asking him to repeat everything. His voice was dry, crackling, satirical.

"My friends," said Mario. "We await my friends."

"Your friends," said Arrigo Furlani, "are either under arrest or dead. Probably the latter. Even the carabinieri do not miss when they use so many bullets."

"*Dio mio*," said Mario, in whom a religious upbringing died hard. "*Povero Aldo. Povero Gianni. Povero—*"

"Enough! You're not saying your rosary. Why don't you turn on the television and see?"

Mario had forgotten the little battery television set they had rented two days before in Naples, procured only (for television was a bourgeois palliative to divert the attention of the working class from their just anger and demands) to follow the reactions of the ruling cadre to the kidnapping and judge their intentions as to ransom demands. Mario walked uncer-

tainly towards it.

"The button on the right," snapped the captive.

The set sprang into life, with gay bandstand music. It was a cartoon.

"Splendid!" said Furlani bitterly. "I get kidnapped and all Italy goes on watching Mr. Maggio."

Mario sat down on the only armchair, already absorbed in the cartoon. He was almost regretful when it finished and the RAI announcer came on with a newflash.

"We repeat the news that Arrigo Furlani, of the Banco Nazionale Piemontese, was this morning kidnapped in Via . . ."

"That's better," said Arrigo Furlani.

"The chauffeur of the kidnapped man was brutally murdered, and in the subsequent police action three members of the gang were killed."

"*Povero Aldo*," breathed Mario. "*Povero—*"

"Shut up! I'm listening," snapped Furlani.

"According to police sources, Furlani was driven away in a car containing three other members of the gang."

"Ha! I should be so lucky!" said Mario in disgust.

The announcer disappeared and the screen was taken over by the scene of carnage in the Via Sparafucile. In the portals

of the bank, the underlings, who had remained so conspicuously inconspicuous during the attack, emerged wringing their hands to be interviewed for the nation.

"Renato Capucci, undermanager," said the interviewer.

"You're fired!" snapped Furlani.

"What kind of man is Arrigo Furlani?"

"A great man," said the undermanager, and gave an oily smile. "Great financier, great democrat, warm, lovable, *un gentil uomo*."

"Ah!" said Arrigo Furlani. "Better. Go on."

"Loved by us all. All of us here at the bank knew that in him we had a true father."

"*Bene!*" said Furlani. "*Un bravo ragazzo!*" Then he was struck by a thought. "What did he mean 'had'?"

After a while, they ate. Mario cooked some spaghetti on the little oil stove, and heated up a tin with meat sauce in it. He slapped the results onto two plates, and took one over to Furlani.

"Eat, pig," he said, jauntily.

"How?" said Furlani.

So Mario had to sit there, spooning it into his mouth. When they had done, Furlani demanded the lavatory. Mario untied him, poked the gun in his back, and took him to the

improvised closet. Furlani blenched at the smell, but bravely went in, slamming the door behind him. He emerged five minutes later.

"My God, what a dump!" he said. "You haven't got the first idea of how to treat a hostage."

They went back to the big room on the first floor. Mario tied up the banker and sat down to eat his spaghetti. It was stone cold.

"You'd better untie me next time, and I'll eat my own," said Furlani spitefully.

"Oh yes? Then I have to keep my gun on you and mine still gets cold."

"What kind of Italian is this, who can't eat his spaghetti with one hand?" demanded Furlani, casting his eyes up to heaven.

By eight o'clock it was time for the *telegiornale*. The news people had got into their stride over the kidnapping. When the body-strewn street had been covered, and the policemen interviewed (by now there were four kidnappers in the getaway car, spraying bullets in their wake), they portentously announced an appeal from the wife of the kidnapped man.

"Ha! Mariella! Where is she? . . . Now, isn't that typical? Look at that hair. She always has that bit dropping down over her forehead. Sloven."

Mariella Furlani began her piece, reading it at first as if it

were a school exercise. "Jesus," said Furlani. "Anyone'd think she was reciting Dante." Then, caught up like any true Italian by the drama of it, she left her script. There came into her voice that throb of true emotion, that catch that betrays pain. By the end there were tears in her eyes and her hands were cupped at the tormentors of her husband in an agony of supplication.

"Better, Mariella. Make them think you care. Don't tell them you're already planning your wardrobe for the funeral.

"... *Bambini?* What the hell are you talking about, woman. *Bambini?* The youngest is seventeen, and sleeping with a garage owner... Oh, very nice, Mariella... emotion... *molto patetico... brava la vedova!*"

Mariella Furlani finished on an impassioned note. As she came to the end, the camera backed away from her. Mariella smirked with enormous self-satisfaction and turned her soft brown eyes toward the newsreader.

"Look! See that? The cow! She's making eyes at other men already! I'll show her. Come on, Mario. We'll write the ransom note now!"

"I can write the ransom note," said Mario.

"Of course you'll write the ransom note, cretin," snapped Furlani. "How would it look if

I wrote it myself? What do you usually write it on?"

"Usually? We never done it before. This is our first."

"Oh, very nice. You choose me to practice on."

Mario wrote with difficulty, but in a half hour or so the note was ready. It was a demand for one hundred and fifty million lire, penned in thick, uncertain capitals, and it ended with the injunction: GET IT READY. INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOWING. OTHERWISE FURLANI IS A DEAD MAN.

Furlani said: "Very good. That will terrify them. Supposing they care. Where are you going to post it?"

That had all been taken care of. "I post this one in Rome. Next one I post in Naples. After that, Pescara."

"Brilliant. Staggeringly clever. So the carabinieri draw a triangle, and they say where is the middle of that triangle, and we get police swarming up and down the autostrada and looked for deserted castles and palazzi. Bravo, Mario! Listen to me: you post first in Rome, then Firenze, then Torino."

It was while Mario was away in Rome next day that Arrigo Furlani wriggled himself free of the not very competently tied ropes. When Mario returned he found him sitting in the one armchair and forking a plateful of something into his mouth.

"Hey, Mario! Have a good day? You try the cannelloni. It's better than the Bolognese."

Mario waved the gun uncertainly at him, but soon he got down to heating up a tin, and later, when they settled down to the *telegiornale*, he forgot the gun altogether.

The result of the ransom note was less impressive than they had hoped. The Banco Nazionale Piemontese, in the person of its national head, appeared on television the next night. The Banco Nazionale if'ed and ah'ed and ahem'ed. It doubted the wisdom, even while it greatly regretted, and it hoped that these dangerous and conscienceless men . . . Furlani sat before the screen, screaming his outrage.

"See! *Ingrati!* Pigs! I work myself into an early heart attack, and see what the response is! I'll cook your goose. Contini," he yelled at the mournfully regretful and hand-wringing national chairman of the Banco Piemontese. He felt in the inside pocket of his now very crumpled suit. "See!" he brandished a piece of paper at the screen. "I drop my briefcase, but I still have *this!* Mario! Quick! Another ransom note!"

And so another note was penned, with less concern about the spelling as they raged over the ingratitude of big capitalists. In this second note the sum

was upped to two hundred million, and Mario added the words: SHALL THE WORLD BE TOLD THE TRUTH ABOUT THE MARCHESE CONTRACT? Furlani smiled bitterly when Mario proudly displayed the completed note.

"Next time, we say the Tartini contract. The time after we say the Donatelli contract. And we up the ransom. I've got plenty of truths about plenty of contracts, if that's the way Contini wants to play."

That, however, proved unnecessary. Mario drove to Firenze the next day ("Pick up some fresh meat, for God's sake, and some vegetables. You're ruining my digestion with those tins. And a reasonable Chianti, nothing special or someone will wonder, with your appearance"). By the following evening the bank was grovelling throughout the news media in its eagerness to fulfill the conditions. The money, the chairman assured a world less than goggling, and mainly interested in whether it could afford its next dish of pasta, was all ready, packed up in used notes, and they waited now only for the instructions concerning the transfer.

Mario had thought about that before. Or rather Aldo and Gianni and the brighter members of the erstwhile group had. Furlani examined the plans as

retailed to him (admittedly imperfectly) by Mario, and found them not merely wanting but positively backwards.

"So they wanted to spend the rest of their lives in jail, your idealistic friends, did they? It's a good job you have me to look after your interests."

When he got down to thinking about it and discussing it with Mario, who at least could be used as a sounding board, the problem sorted itself out into two component parts. One was the actual getting of the money. The second was where to go with it afterwards. The first was the simpler of the two.

"All we have to do is set a place where they are to put the suitcases with the money. Wide open place. If there is a stationary car within miles, we drive on and start again. If this is done, we promise I will be found twelve hours later. We'll go in the car. No, we'll hire a faster one. I'll be bound and handcuffed in the front seat. We'll put a couple of bolsters in the back, to represent the men they think we've got, crouched down. Simple. No problem. They won't dare to try anything, in case they have a corpse on their hands. The problem is, where we go afterwards."

"Where we go afterwards," said Mario obediently.

"There's North Africa. We could hire a boat. You could.

False passports. Probably slip in unobserved, with those dumbchucks down there. . . . Still, all those damned Arabs. I've never really fancied North Africa. . . . Probably have some fanatic take over, and turn it into a strict Islamic state."

He thought about the penalty for theft, and looked down apprehensively at his hands.

"What about Switzerland then? Very picturesque. Good, good place for bankers!"

But when he thought about it, he didn't greatly fancy Switzerland either. All those mountains—so fatiguing. And cows. And lymphatic women. And the lousy weather and the lack of coastline.

When he thought about it, the only country he really fancied was Italy. And in this Mario agreed. They got quite sentimental about it.

"With all its faults," announced Furlani expansively, "with all this damned terrorism, all this corruption, the Mafia, all the rest, it's still the best country in the world for a civilized man, for a man of enterprise!"

"*E' vero!*" shouted Mario. "*Viva l'Italia!*"

They drank a couple of glasses of Chianti on it, and got very cosy, and it was in this mood of sentimental nationalism that Arrigo Furlani got his idea.

"I have it! Ha-ha! Literally I

have it! I have a little estate—a *proprietà*—”

“But that’s impossible!” protested Mario.

“Not in my own name, you understand. Secret. Totally secret. For purposes of—what shall we call it?—tax adjustment. I own it, in the name of Luciano Doretti. I have been there—what?—three times. With a young lady. With three young ladies. Hardly a soul has seen us. I have dark glasses on, a little false beard. Now—see!—I have a real beard!” He fingered the thick stubble. “The perfect plan!”

“Where is this estate?” asked Mario.

“Between Firenze and Siena. Perfect! Lonely. But good neighbors. Good class. Tuscan aristocrats. English intellectuals. After a year or two we could mix. I could mix. Is perfect!”

And that was how they did it. Six days later, in a very fast hired car, with smoked glass windows, they retrieved two suitcases full of notes (they checked before they drove off) from a lonely stretch of road deep in the Mezzogiorno. Mario drove with a new confidence, and when they were well away he even began to sing—love songs, happy songs, songs sung rather better by Caterina Valente.

Furlani did not stop him. He was feeling almost benevolent. He had insisted on going to the assignation bound and gagged, which showed a commendable sense of verisimilitude, as well as a sensible desire to save his own skin. He had insisted on Mario’s keeping his gun in his hand during the actual retrieval of the money. After all, the plan might have misfired. But nothing went wrong. They drove and drove in the summer sun, up the eastern coast of Italy. Sometimes they stopped for a drink—and poured liberal glasses of real French brandy and laughed, and horsed around. Then Furlani demanded to be bound and gagged again, and they continued on their way. Often they listened to the car radio: Radio Italy was reporting that the Banco Nazionale Piemontese was cautiously optimistic that its revered manager would be free in a few hours’ time, certain measures having been taken. Mario threw back his head and roared, and Furlani sniggered through his gag.

It was a time of suspense for a lot of people. The chairman of the Banco Nazionale sat in the head office, hoping that at last (one way or another) the lid had been put on the question of the Marchese contract. And in her splendid bourgeois home in the center of Rome, surrounded by

consoling maids and yapping dogs, Mariella Furlani sat on the sofa, picking with long painted fingernails at a tiny handkerchief, letting out little whimpers of anguish, and hopping against hope. Surely it was possible that something would yet go wrong?

Long after nightfall, Furlani and Mario arrived at his estate of Campo-Castella, five miles from the tiny village of Bandolero. Everything was in total darkness.

"Untie me," hissed Furlani. Unhesitatingly Mario obeyed.

"Put the car in the garage," whispered Furlani. "Tomorrow we'll abandon it somewhere. Torino perhaps. I have the house key on my key ring."

He opened the front door of the farmhouse, and cautiously put on the light. Presently Mario came in with the suitcases.

"Nice," he said, looking around. "Is very nice."

"We'll make it better?" suggested Furlani. "Can you paper? It needs to be lived in. And we'll buy another car. A Mercedes."

"Ai! Mercedes!" howled Mario, in rapture. He put down the suitcases, and finally threw the gun down on the splendid oak dining table.

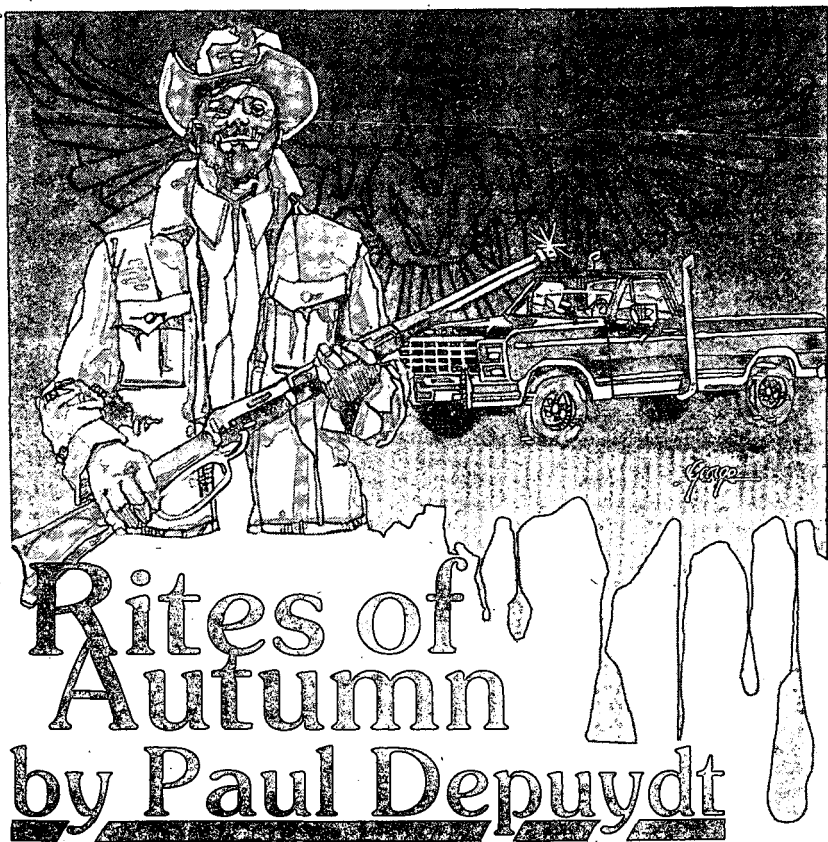
"Careful. It's antique!" snapped Furlani. But then a

better mood overtook him.

"We're safe!" he shouted.

"Safe!" yelled Mario. And they sang and danced, and then they yelled in triumph and danced a bit more and did jigs of happiness. Then they poured out large glasses of whisky, and Furlani found some ice in the refrigerator. They opened the cases again, and feasted their eyes on the money. Mario took one bundle up and gazed on it with reverence. Then he split open the wrapping band, and threw the hundred notes from the bundle into the air. They seemed to his childlike gaze to float, there in the musty air, float in infinite promise. Furlani took up a bundle, too, and threw it into the air. Then they pelted each other, and then they grovelled around like babies in the thick carpet of *lire*.

Once in the course of their night-long binge of triumph Furlani did look at the gun on the table. It would be so easy to finish off Mario now, and bury him in the grounds. But Furlani was essentially a man of peace. Corrupt, and a bully, but essentially a man of peace. And really, what would be the point? Mario was a good boy. Almost a son to him. And very stupid. He wouldn't give him any trouble. And after all, he was going to need a chauffeur.



I was being hypnotized by the neon bronc rider. Whether I turned my head or shut my eyes, the image had burned into my nerve paths and kept flashing in my head like a TV ghost image.

I'm getting too old for this, I thought. I took another swig of

my cold coffee. It tasted like cardboard.

The place was called The Thirsty Cowhand, and pickup trucks and jeans outnumbered sedans and sports clothes by a wide margin. The dust from the parking lot swirled and shimmered around the neon rider,

and I swear to God he was turning real. I had to sight past the sign and align it with the moon to assure myself that he wasn't buckjumping right across the highway.

"Cowboys." I spat the remainder of the coffee through the open car window. "Fifteen years on the force and I've got to sit here drinking cold coffee and getting neon seared on my brain. All to babysit cowboys."

"If you remember, we never had so many brawls out here before. Not till Hutch Wiggins installed that mechanical bull." Dave took a last drag on his cigarette, then crushed the butt into the overflowing ashtray. This was Dave's regular shift, but Al, his usual partner, was sick. As chief deputy and acting sheriff, it was up to me to cover the holes in the roster. That seemed to be more and more often in these budget-cutting days.

"We can't blame old Hutch for trying to turn a dollar. If it wasn't this, it'd be some other excuse to raise hell."

"Yeah, I guess." I twisted in my seat, trying to ease the sore knot in my back.

"How'd your dinner go this afternoon?"

"We had chicken again." I hated campaign dinners. Sometimes I wished I'd never filed to run for sheriff full time.

"You know you're the only one with a chance to beat Wellman. If you lose, he's in control of the whole county."

"Oh hell, I know that. But they didn't listen to a word I said. One old lady said the gray in my mustache made me look distinguished. What's that got to do with who should be sheriff?"

There were coffee grounds caught in my teeth, I noticed, with annoyance.

"Al calls B. C. Wellman 'Before Christ.'" Dave grinned. "Says that's how he ranks himself in the natural hierarchy."

"That's not new. They used to say the same thing about old B. C., Sr., back when he was buying up half the county."

"That's what I don't understand. Why would Wellman want to be sheriff in the first place? The old man left him fixed for life. What's he get out of it?"

"Power. And control. That's what he hungers for. He never had it while the old man was alive, and now he's got a terrible thirst. Sheriff is a powerful position in a small county like this. A stepping stone. B.C. probably figures this is just the start toward . . . What's that?"

But I knew what it was even as I was speaking. We don't hear much gunfire outside of hunting season, but the faint

popcorn sound from across the road was unmistakable. That wasn't the kind of trouble we were primed for, and I guess we were a little slow off the mark. A shadow had sprinted from the main entrance and already reached a pickup parked in the first row before Dave reached for the ignition.

"There!" The pickup was moving, but we still had time to cut it off.

"Hit it, Dave."

Dave punched the lights and the siren and tromped on the accelerator. Our tires spun, then grabbed, and we were skidding toward the highway. We'd been parked in the lot at George's Standard Service, and Dave missed the driveway. We fish-tailed over the curb and Dave was fighting the wheel to straighten us out when the steel-belted, puncture-proof, heavy duty Police Special mounted on the left front wheel let go with a shotgun-like blast. Our sliding skid bent into a full circle in the middle of the road and we fetched up sideways, back against the curb in front of George's.

I felt like the neon bronc rider had finally made it across the road and ridden right over me. The pickup was just a fast-disappearing set of taillights as I reached for the radio under the dash.

There was a small bunch of customers milling around the doorway of The Thirsty Cowhand. I warned them to stay put until we could get names and addresses and pushed on through. The interior was a sprawling, open-beamed area that looked like a cross between a livery stable and a ballroom.

Above my right shoulder were more people, where ten-inch, rough-hewn poles supported a plank mezzanine. The booths underneath the mezzanine were arranged like stalls, and were mostly empty. The middle area was open for dancing and to make space for the mechanical bull. Another group had huddled in the bull-riding area, and somebody was crying over there with whimpering little sobs.

The remainder of the crowd was clumped together over to my left, where a long, curving bar and a bandstand dominated that whole end of the building. I recalled that the backbar had featured a mirror on which had been painted a huge naked lady. The buxom backbar angel was gone now, converted to a million glittering bits and shards of glass. One of the bartenders was holding a red-stained handkerchief to his cheek. Everybody in the crowd was pretending not to look toward the other end of the bar. I turned that way.

It doesn't matter how often you've seen violent death. There's always that quick, inward suck of air, the slow, roiling churn in your gut. She was sprawled half on her back, feet tangled in an overturned chair. The impact of youth turned to ghastliness sears all the senses and leaves you breathless, with an acid, coppery taste in your mouth. You see the gaping tear in the throat, the already sunken, gray deathmask with the underlying bone shape evident, but the mind's eye sheers off the horror and takes refuge in inconsequentials, so that you find yourself carefully studying each detail of the hat lying to one side with the crumpled feather pinned to the band.

You know how much blood the human body can hold, but it's too much to grasp to have it all pooling and puddling at your feet, so you find yourself thinking how this section of the floor will have to be replaced. The whole scene has a peculiar clarity, so that weeks later you could describe with equal exactness the design stitched on the boots or the pattern smeared in the blood by a dying hand.

"There—there's someone else." A voice spoke behind me. I turned toward the bar, forcing the bloody grotesquery from my mind.

Oh, Christ. I almost said it

aloud. Lonnie Wellman was half sitting, half lying, with his back against the bar. One murder was bad enough, but if B.C. Wellman's little brother had been killed there'd really be hell to pay.

"I think he hit his head. He fell backward when the shooting started." It was the same voice again, a girl in jeans.

"Were you together?" I stooped toward Lonnie and felt carefully behind his neck and head. There was no blood.

"No. We were at the next table. He was with, with . . ." she gestured in the direction of the dead girl.

Lonnie Wellman was stirring under my hands. He sat up, holding himself upright with both hands flat on the floor:

"Something wrong, shots. Been shot."

"Take it easy, Mr. Wellman."

"Who? Oh, you." He made as if to spit to one side, but winced when he started to turn his head.

He raised his voice. "I could have been killed. What kind of police force do you run? This county's not safe."

He was affecting the crowd, already scared and edgy. Where was Dave? It seemed like a half hour since I'd come inside.

"Take it easy," I said again. "You've been unconscious. Be careful. An ambulance will be

here in a minute."

"I don't need . . ." He looked toward the girl on the floor, swallowed, and looked again.

"No. Is that Susie? That can't be Susie." He tried to get up. "He killed her." Lonnie pushed against me, struggling to stand up.

"Get your hands off me." He fought harder. "I'll kill him. I swear, I'll kill him." He looked at me now, his voice husked down to a grating sound.

"Careful, there," I snapped. "We'll catch him, don't worry about that."

"You can't stop me. Let me go." He started to struggle again. The crowd was stirring restlessly behind me, but I didn't dare let go of him. I leaned harder, holding him down, and he settled back, trying to murder me with looks. I felt like that proverbial fellow up to his guess what in alligators, only lately it seemed all my alligators were named Wellman.

By noon my eyelids felt as if I had sandpaper wedged behind them. Bert's Diner was almost empty when Dave and I went in. Neither of us had had any sleep yet. We knew all about the fry cook's endless experiments in recycling used cooking oil, so we just ordered coffee. If it was as bad as usual, it'd be

strong enough to keep us awake a while longer.

"I'm worried about young Wellman," I said. "I shouldn't have let him go. What if he beats us to the killer?"

"You know damn well you couldn't throw him in jail." Dave looked as drawn and worn as I felt.

"Yeah, but there's something here I can't put my finger on. Wellman acted almost like he knew something about this mess."

"How could he? You said yourself he went crazy over the girl."

"Susan Powers was his fiancée. But you saw the doc's report. That wasn't a clean wound. More like a ricochet. I think somebody was after Wellman, and missed. And I think Wellman has some notion who it might have been." I rubbed my eyes, then wished I hadn't when they started to burn even worse.

"We've got to pick up something quick, Dave. Sift the statements again when you come back. Somebody must have seen him clearly. There were a lot of people on the mezzanine when he fired down at Wellman."

"He wore a hat. We don't have one clear description in the whole lot."

"And talk to that girl again,

too, the one who saw the bird on the getaway truck."

"Hell, every third pickup's got an eagle painted on the back window."

"She insisted it wasn't an eagle. That's why she noticed it."

I sent Dave home to bed, and wished I could do the same. I headed out the highway, trying to ignore the fog in my brain. Wellman. Somebody after Wellman. Christ, half the county hated the Wellmans. Tomorrow I'd have to see who might be on their current list of enemies. I tried not to think how this was going to affect the election next month, telling myself it wasn't important now.

At the moment I wanted to talk to B.C.

Borden Catlett Wellman, Jr., lived in the house his father had erected atop a knoll east of town. He'd moved in only two weeks after the old man was buried. As I drove through the gate, I noticed that the well-tended grounds were still a vivid green despite the lateness of the season. The white rail fences gleamed as though they'd been whitewashed only yesterday. I tried to imagine B.C. in that dark corner of the courthouse, presiding over the miserably furnished sheriff's office. The image wouldn't take hold; too fantastic. He'd probably

move the office out here.

"Can I help you?" The old man had come around the corner of the veranda while I was knocking on the door. He must have been over seventy, and I remembered him from years back when he worked for the first B.C. Wellman.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Wellman."

"He's not at home." That had been the story all morning.

"Do you know where I can contact him? When he'll be back?"

"I'm sorry."

"Please tell him to call me when he returns."

So where was Wellman? I couldn't locate him in town, either. It didn't feel right. His information sources were good. He had to know I'd been sitting right across the street while his future sister-in-law was being gunned down. He'd never pass up an opportunity like this. I should have found him camped on the courthouse steps screaming his outrage, burying me forever in the public's mind.

Lonnie Wellman had a much smaller house in town. One of the manypieces of property the Wellmans owned. It took Lonnie a long time to answer my knock. He smelled sour, looked hungover.

"Can I come in?"

"Show me your warrant."

"Look, I'm sorry about what happened. But I need your help."

"I can stomp my own rats. All you little tin gods, playing games with people's lives. Well, I'm gonna fix his wagon, and yours, too, if you get in my way."

"Who? Who are you after? I could arrest you, you know. Force you to talk."

"Get out of here, and don't come back without a warrant."

"Do you know where B.C. . . ." but I was talking to a slammed door. I considered hauling Lonnie in, but I wasn't sure what I was looking for, or if he really knew anything concrete. One thing you learned was that people do things for tortured reasons of their own, and you played hell trying to get a straight story before they were ready to tell.

Frustration. Questions without answers. I caught the red light in the corner of my eye and slammed to a sudden halt. An old lady in the crosswalk glared at me. Another voter for B.C. The jarring stop reminded me of our aborted chase. The garage had promised us a new tire this morning. I might as well save Al the trip, since I wasn't doing any good at solving any murders today.

Our local Ford dealer was another Wellman enterprise. They

had the county contract, courtesy of B.C.'s influence with the county commissioners. Dave was right. Why did he want to be in office? He already had the county pretty well sewed up. Just couldn't stand not having us under his thumb, I guess.

I parked behind a row of new pickups and vans. Sam Johnson was the head of maintenance, and he met me at the garage door.

"Got your tire all ready. But first I want to show you something."

He led me past the grease rack to the tire repair area in the next service bay. He pointed to a blown tire leaning against a wobbly stack of retreads.

"There's your tire. Look close where it blew."

I stooped down, then crouched and looked closer.

"See." Sam laid his finger against the damaged area. "See that clean cut? It goes half around the tire, cut right through the treads. Even cut through the outer steel belt. You were running on just the inner belt. She was bound to blow the first hard stress you put on her."

"There was nothing on the road that could have done that."

"Exactly what I'm getting at. These tires are tough. That was done with some kind of tool, maybe a hatchet or small saw.

Somebody made sure she'd blow."

Somebody had known we'd be there, and so he'd stopped us. I drove back to the office feeling like a man in quicksand. We'd been whipsawed, Dave and I, but the trap had snapped on a young girl. So who was the real target? Me? Lonnie Wellman?

I found Dave at his desk, working on his report. That hadn't been much of a nap.

"Come up with anything?"

"Nothing worthwhile. He had a beard. Nothing else new. Confirmed that he wore a hat, used a lever action rifle, like a Marlin or a Winchester. Nobody recognized him. Wellman must have been the target. Nobody else sitting close to him and his girl. You know, that's a funny thing. One couple sat at the next table just before the shooting, and Wellman told them to get out. Said he wanted to be alone. In the middle of a crowd. Those Wellmans sure have got a full measure of gall. The couple was gonna argue, but then everything blew up."

"That's no crazier than what I've got. Our tire was cut ahead of time. Somebody planned all this. Did you get anything on the truck?"

"Maybe. No make or model, but the girl thinks maybe an Indian bird symbol painted on the window. I asked her could

it be a thunderbird and tried to draw one for her, but she said not exactly. Said it looked weird. All black, and big enough to cover most of the window. Sounds like something we might be able to spot."

"Probably a vulture. Sent to pick our bones." I plugged in the hot plate and got water for coffee.

Two more hours of comparing notes got us no further. I worked on reports after Dave left and finally fell asleep on the couch in the corner of the office. I was still there when Jane, our dispatcher, came to work the next morning. My back was knotted and one foot was still asleep. I grimaced as I stomped it back to life.

I sat over the morning paper with coffee. The Susan Powers funeral was scheduled for today, and the editorial was burying me right along with her. Too bad. The paper had been cautiously in my corner, always keeping a careful eye cocked on the Wellman advertising revenue. I crumpled it up and threw it in the wastebasket.

"I'm going in back to clean up."

I kept a locker at the jail behind the office. I stepped into the shower and tried to scrub away the feeling that I was sinking into the ashes. This case was consuming me. I didn't

have any idea where to head next. The bird on the truck had been a vulture, all right.

The mind works in circles, not straight lines. Sometimes you make associations you're not even aware of. As I relaxed under the shower, I thought about two circles that had just joined in my head. Birds and ashes. I had seen one. I had just seen a phoenix rising from the ashes. Another circle joined. This case was full of Wellmans. I had seen a phoenix at Wellman's truck lot when I picked up the tire. And that was also the lot where all the county cars were serviced. I hurriedly dressed and headed back to the office.

"Jane, call Dave and Al. Find out if we had any of our cars serviced Saturday while I was out campaigning. And tell Dave to meet me at the Ford dealer's. I'll be on the truck lot."

There was a frosty chill in the morning air, but it was sunny. The frost coating was already clearing from the windows of the trucks and vans. The third truck from the end was a short-box pickup with chrome wheels and exhaust stacks. It was orange and black, with flame decals on the fenders. The painting on the rear window featured a black phoenix with outstretched wings. The design filled the whole window. Dave

caught up with me, and I pointed out the truck.

"I think I've found your weird black bird." We headed for the sales manager's office.

"This dealership and its inventory are owned by Mr. B.C. Wellman, are they not?"

The manager squirmed in his chair, behind his desk. I stood, leaning over and dominating him.

It wasn't too difficult to force the manager to admit that the orange and black truck, like all the others on the lot, was owned by B.C. Wellman, and that one of his ranch employees had picked it up Saturday afternoon and returned it Monday morning. He really couldn't say if Wellman's man was on the lot at the same time as a county cruiser was brought in for service, but yes, it did sound like the same time of day that the truck was picked up. He really couldn't say more without checking.

"Mr. Wellman arranged the use of the truck himself? Mr. B.C. Wellman?"

"Yes, Mr. Wellman called me personally. If you want to know more, you really should talk to him."

"You leave that truck right where it is until we get some lab people down here. Come on, Dave."

"Hey, slow down. You're

tracking too fast for me. I buy the truck, but you act like you've got a lot more. What's the rest of it?"

"Look. We know this was planned ahead of time, that we were set up. Here is where they could have got to our tire, because Al had the car here on Saturday. And this is where the getaway truck came from, also picked up on Saturday. And something you said yourself. Lonnie Wellman was letting nobody sit close to him, despite the crowd. He knew shots were coming, but a ricochet went astray.

"B.C. knows his brother. When B.C. heard about the girl, he took off. And you heard just now that B.C. set it all up personally. Now hurry. You've got to stop Lonnie before he finds B.C. Bring him in. I don't care on what charge, just get him. I'll try to get to B.C. Let's move."

The five miles to Wellman's place seemed like fifty. Self-disgust rose inside me until I could almost taste the bitterness in my mouth. I'd known I should have brought Lonnie in. But he was a Wellman, and I wasn't sure of myself. A bitter pill, all right. Priding myself for my independence of the Wellman influence, then backing off at the first test. I realized now how

secretly glad I'd been that I couldn't find B.C., that he wasn't around. All my fault. If anybody else had been involved, I'd have pushed and dug until I found out everything they knew.

I turned too fast into the driveway and scraped a fender on the gatepost. I pulled the nose of the car right up to the veranda, took the riot gun from the dash clips, and went to the door.

The door was standing ajar.

I found the old man I'd talked to lying against a chair in the third room I checked. I winced as I saw his face. Somebody had used his head for a punching bag. One arm was cocked at an unnatural angle. Blood was still dripping from his nose and several facial cuts. His chest heaved, and I heard a bubbling breath rattle. At least he wasn't dead.

I found a cloth, wetted it in the kitchen, and cleared the mashed tissue, mucus, and broken teeth from his mouth so he could breathe easier. I laid a wet cloth on his forehead.

"Can you hear me? Where did they go? Can you hear?"

He breathed faster. One swollen eyelid fluttered.

"This is the police. Help is coming. Where did they go?"

His good hand scrabbled at my shirtsleeve. I leaned closer.

"Lo . . . Lo . . ."

"Yes, I know. Lonnie, looking for B.C."

"No. Lo . . . dge. Lodge."

Lodge. I should have thought of it myself. The Wellmans had a lodge on Lake Mahaska, near the county line. I left the old man as comfortable as possible and headed west. I radioed for an ambulance and got a call in to Dave.

Power and control. Controlling me right along with everybody else. I was still running behind. Even the girl's name should have been a clue. A crazy stunt. A dumb, tragic scheme to discredit me, to shift the election odds. I suppose nobody was to have been hurt. Maybe the gunman had been nervous, or had smoke in his eyes. Shots too close, a wild ricochet, and now a vengeance-mad brother to add to the carnage. A brother I should have locked up two days ago.

I slowed as I reached the lake turnoff. The Wellman lodge stood by itself at the end of a winding, deadend drive. I coasted past the cottages and boathouses, most of them closed and shuttered for winter. My windshield exploded in a shower of glass as I came around the last curve before the Wellman property. I yanked the wheel to the left and skidded into the brush at the side of the road. I grabbed my riot gun and slid

out of the car as another shot punched into the interior. I inched backward, got a tree between myself and Lonnie, then went back along the road to warn Dave. I heard a flurry of shots behind me, more than one weapon. Apparently those in the house were armed, too.

Dave arrived in less than five minutes. I flagged him down before the last curve.

"It's a goddamned war. Lonnie's in a grove of trees and brush over there, and B.C.'s pinned down in the lodge."

"We tried calling to warn B.C.," Dave told me, "but the line's dead to the lodge. More help is on the way. We'll have half the police in the state here in another hour."

"We can't wait that long. He knows we're here, so he'll make his move right now. Look, it's fairly open ground from here to the lodge, just scattered trees and shrubs. A car can drive up to the lodge, with or without the road. If I could get past him, we'd have him pinned between us. Here." I gave Dave my revolver.

"You sure about this?"

"Lonnie's got to be stopped now. I'll make a run in your car. You crawl up to my car and give me covering fire. You've got twelve shots plus your riot gun. I want him to feel like the goddamned Marines have landed

right on top of him."

I let Dave have two minutes to get into position. I had my riot helmet strapped on, and was crouched as low behind the wheel as possible. No slow-moving targets for Lonnie this time. I was already doing forty as I squealed around the curve. Something thunked behind me as the speedometer passed fifty. I swerved off the road, but kept the tires spinning despite the fishtailing. I fought the wheel, trying to stay on an angle between Lonnie and the lodge. I hit a root, or a hole, slewed sideways, and bounced the passenger door off an oak tree. The engine killed, and I rolled out of the car. Not as close as I'd like to be, but maybe far enough.

A shot hit the tree next to me, and I heard Dave's shotgun answer. I took advantage of Dave's fire and took off for some bushes, hit the ground, rolled, and flopped behind another tree. Getting too damned old. It was several seconds before I could control my heaving breath enough to holler at Lonnie.

"Give it up, Wellman. We've got you boxed."

"Dirty sons-a-bitches. I'll kill you all."

I placed him by the sound of his voice and aimed three shots at him as fast as I could work the pump on the shotgun. I

headed for another tree. A spray of wood splinters stung my cheek. I picked a sliver out of my face, feeling a trickle of blood. I was close now, and I could hear Wellman cussing and swearing over the ringing in my ears. Dave fired again. I risked a look and saw Wellman in some brush, facing in Dave's direction and fighting the bolt on his rifle. I aimed low, shooting for his legs. He went down, thrashing in the brush.

I enjoyed the clean crispness of the fall morning. But then everything seems better after a solid fifteen hours of sleep. The coffee was already brewed by the time I got to the office, a paper lying on my desk. The editorials were back on my side again. The grand jury was expected to indict George Mueller, an employee of Wellman's who'd actually done the shooting, for murder. Wellman's legal staff had done its job well. No mention of charges against either B.C. or Lonnie. It figured. I knew they'd both wind up with a change of venue and get off with reduced charges. Well, you took what you could get. Their power in this county would never be the same again. That had to be enough.

"Is there another cup left in that coffee pot?"

CASES ON FILE

The History of Secret Writing
by Laurence Dwight Smith

53††305))6*; 4826)4†)4†);
806*; 48†8†60)85; 1†(; †
8†83(88)5†; 46(; 88*96*?
8)*†(; 485); 5*†2.*†(; 4956
2(5 - 4)8†8*; 4069285);
)6†8)4††; 1(†9; 48081; 8;
8†1; 48†85; 4)485†528806*8
1(†9; 48; (88; 4(†734; 48)
4†; 161; :188; †?;

Cryptography (from Greek κρυπτος, *hidden*, + γραφια, *writing*) in one form or another has probably been practiced ever since man has communicated his thoughts in speech or writing. References are made to it in the Bible. One of the oldest known examples is the Spartan scytale: Plutarch tells how Lacedæmonian generals exchanged messages by winding narrow ribbons of parchment spirally around a cylindrical staff. The message was then inscribed on the parchment. When the ribbon was unwound, the writing could be read only by the person who

had a cylinder of exactly the same size, upon which to rewind it, so that the letters would reappear in their normal order.

Another ancient, if somewhat ludicrous, means of sending secret messages was devised by an ingenious Histiaëus, when he was at the Persian court. He wished to send word to Aristagoras, his son-in-law who was in Greece, to revolt. It was, of course, vital that the message should not be intercepted. To assure secrecy Histiaëus shaved the head of his most trusted slave, tattooed it with his message, and waited until the hair grew. The slave was instructed to say to Aristagoras, "Shave

Above, the famous cipher from Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Gold Bug."

From Cryptography: The Science of Secret Writing by Laurence Dwight Smith, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, N.Y. Copyright © 1943 by Laurence Dwight Smith. Copyright renewed 1971 by Margaret N. Smith and Kathryn Smith Miller.

my head and look thereon." Aristagoras revolted. Although the speed with which communication is now possible makes this method of the fifth century B.C. appear somewhat inefficient, even during the First World War it was the practice to send spies across the enemy lines with messages written on their skins with invisible ink.

More scientific cryptograms were devised by the early Greeks, who frequently used arithmetical figures. One of their methods of substituting mathematical figures for letters was to block the alphabet into a square, as shown below, and to number each vertical and horizontal row from one to five. As one letter of a 26-letter alphabet must be omitted, I, in our alphabet, can be made to serve both as I and J, or U as both U and V.

	1	2	3	4	5
1	A	F	L	Q	V
2	B	G	M	R	W
3	C	H	N	S	X
4	D	I	O	T	Y
5	E	K	P	U	Z

Each letter of the message is indicated by the numbers of the intersecting rows, reading first the numbers from the vertical column. C becomes 31, the intersection of horizontal row 3 and vertical column 1; H is 32; and so on. To illustrate, perhaps the

22-24-51-51-52-34

32-11-41

11

33-11-23-51

12-43-24

42-44

The scytale described by Plutarch, to which we referred above, was a little more complicated than this numerical alphabet, because it disarranged the order of the letters. This shuffling of the letters to make the message unreadable is known as transposition encipherment. It is one of the two basic principles of modern cryptography. It differs fundamentally from the method employed in the square above, in that concealment is reached by disarranging the letter sequence, not by using numbers in place of the customary alphabet. This replacement of the normal letters by symbols, numbers, or other letters is the second basic principle of present-day systems, known as substitution encipherment.

The substitution of one letter for another according to a prearranged method was a favorite device of the Romans. Suetonius, in his biography of Julius Caesar, described the latter's method of secret writing. Like many of the great generals of history, Caesar seems to have been sadly lacking in cryptographic subtlety. Instead

of the required letter he wrote the third letter after it—D for A, E for B, and so forth—a system which even a novice in deciphering would probably break in ten minutes. Thereafter the messages could be read almost as easily as if they were written in plain text.

Historically, one of the most interesting substitution ciphers during the Middle Ages was that of Charlemagne. He used a complete set of alphabetical equivalents that must have caused his generals many a sleepless night trying to memorize them. He had a number of different alphabets; in one of these, for example, the following character is typical.¹

l = X

Perhaps the method most commonly practiced before the Renaissance was the improvised alphabet on page 00. It was a favorite among the Freemasons as late as the sixteenth century and is probably quite as popular among school children today:

¹This is one of the most simple and consistent substitution characters used by Charlemagne. Other more esoteric symbols he used are:

a b c d e f g h i k l m
 n o p q r s t u x y z
 B V X H O S E 4 A T Y

A	B	C
D	E	F
G	H	I

~~J
K L
M~~

N	O	P
Q	R	S
T	U	V

~~W
X Y
Z~~

This type of cipher, or one of its variations, is frequently used by boys, with a dogged belief in the sanctity of confidential communications, and it still appears to be proof against the inquisitive eye of the teacher. Should she intercept the message below, in its grapevine transit of the schoolroom, she would think it was a meaningless scribble, and toss the priceless and soul-stirring message contemptuously into the wastepaper basket.

^ J O < [. < U F O
 < U F O [U A

Many ingenious variations of this type of cipher were in vogue during the fifteenth century. They are generally spoken of as diagrammatic ciphers. Even in modern times such a system is easily masked in pictures, sheet music, maps, and photographs. Military censors have learned to be suspicious of even the

most innocent-looking sketches or pictorial greeting cards. Although in appearance such ciphers do not resemble substitution ciphers, they are in fact nothing more than a very simple type of that system, and can be broken very easily, provided the messages are long enough, by the study of letter frequency. No matter what the substitution is, whether it is a different letter, the position of a dot, or the length of a line, the recurrence of any of these inevitably gives away the secret that at first glance seems so effectively concealed. By comparing the four cryptograms given on the following page the reader will see that the only essential difference between them is their appearance.

In each case, read from left to right, starting with the highest dot, end of line, change of direction or angle, as the case may be, and continue downwards. Each dot or stop indicates the proper letter in the alphabetical key retained by both correspondents.¹ Thus the message reads

QU IT ET RU E

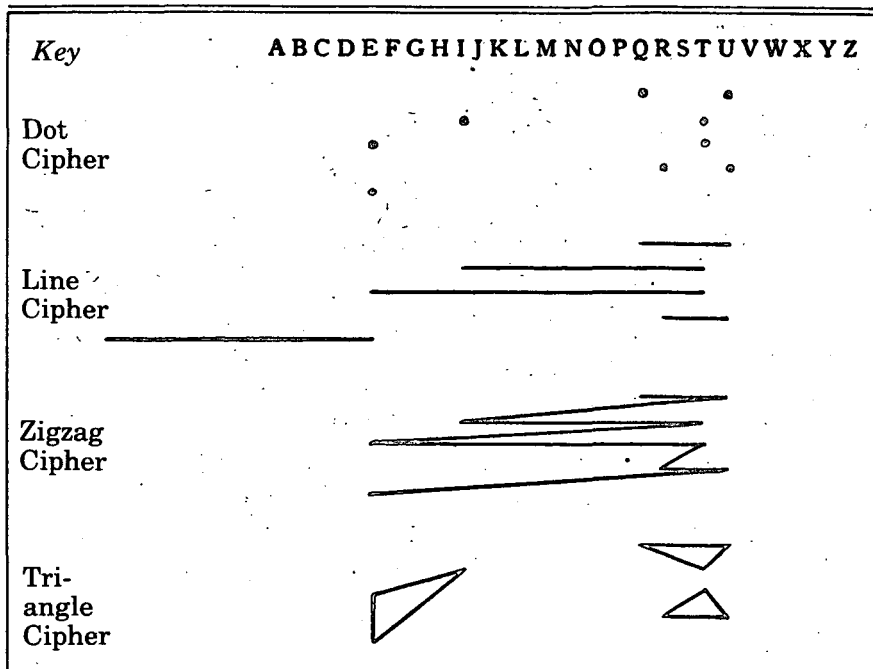
The same message is given in each variation to make the

¹In this example it is not necessary for the sender or the receiver to have an artificial key in his possession, because the spacing may be that of the standard typewriter, with the sheet inserted against the left guide.

identity of the four systems more obvious.

The zigzag cipher offers possibilities of further concealment. Instead of a line, a thread may be drawn from A to Z, and a small mark made on the thread to indicate the location of the first letter of the message. Then drawing the thread back from Z to A, the second letter is indicated, and the process continued until the entire message is enciphered. If one end of an entire spool of thread were used, and the spool then rewound by machinery, a spy might get such a message past even the most alert intelligence organization.

Considerable interest and adeptness in cryptography were developed during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. It was the custom in those days for people of importance to have private ciphers. The personal ciphers of Mary Stuart, the Charleses I and II, the Georges, and other English monarchs are in the possession of the British Museum and British Foreign Office. For the most part they were based on substitution, either with letters or phonetic symbols, and were nearly always so complicated that the key could not be memorized but had to be reduced to writing. In this respect they had a disadvantage inherent in codes—both correspondents had



to have copies of the key.

Francis Bacon was devoted to cryptography. One of the Shakespeare-Bacon arguments is concerned with the significance of the word *honorificabilitudinitatibus*, that appears in *Love's Labour's Lost* (V, i). It is the basis for Donnelly's *The Great Cryptogram* and Mrs. Gallup's *Bi-Literal Cipher*. Probably the only unconscious humor from the pen of Mark Twain is in his treatises on the Baconian theory.

Bacon classified cryptography (which he called "cyphers") under grammar. An early admirer of his writes that Bacon's

system was "one of the most ingenious methods of writing in cipher, and the most difficult to be deciphered, of any yet contrived." Possibly Bacon had his tongue in his cheek when he declared that a perfect cipher was one "not laborious to write and read." It is difficult to conceive of any more laborious to write than his bi-literal cipher, which had to be printed by letterpress in two different type faces, the difference between them being scarcely discernible; once enciphered, the message could be deciphered only by the most complicated process, that strained not only the

patience but also the eyes.

One of the most celebrated cryptanalysts, whose name, however, has come down to us as a mathematician rather than as a cipher expert, was François Viète (1540-1603). Near the end of the sixteenth century the Spanish empire extended over a considerable part of the world, and its agents were communicating with one another by means of a cipher of over five hundred signs, which they varied from time to time. Some of the Spanish dispatches fell into the hands of Henry IV of France. He turned them over to Viète, who succeeded in deciphering them and was able to follow the successive variations. Henry kept this knowledge secret for two years, but then the Spaniards learned that their cipher had been broken. With righteous indignation they demanded that the Holy See have Viète tried before a Roman court as a wizard and necromancer in league with the devil. Fortunately, the pope had a sense of the absurd and was able to share in the amusement caused by this proceeding. Although the examination was begun by a commission of cardinals, it is to this day unfinished, and the chances of an early decision seem remote.

The story of the development of military cryptography through the eighteenth, nine-

teeth, and twentieth centuries would fill volumes. The effects of secret writings upon the outcome of the wars and diplomatic encounters of history are innumerable, and the devices used have ranged from the writing of hidden messages in a musical score to the arrangement of the fifty-two cards in a pack so that their order carried information.

However, the employment of cryptography has not been confined to the purposes of diplomacy and warfare. It has been widely used for the sake of economy, as indicated by the numerous existing commercial codes. It has also identified itself in many ways with literature, and has even proved its value to kidnappers, gangsters, and other modern racketeers.

Even before the invention of telegraphy the possibilities of cryptography as a means of reducing postage charges occurred to people with sharp wits and small purses. Years ago in England the postage charge for carrying a letter was one shilling or more for each hundred miles. Old newspapers, however, traveled gratis, by virtue of their stamps. To the shrewd mind of the poor man this presented an opportunity. Hundreds of impecunious people stretched their budgets by placing dots over the printed letters in the journals, thus

writing letters, which the government delivered without charge to the addressee.

In literature, cryptography has been the basis of the plot of such well-known stories as Maurice Leblanc's *The Hollow Needle*, Poe's *The Gold Bug*, and Jules Verne's *La Jangada*. Francis Bacon, as we have noted, was zealously interested in the art of secret writing, as was the Earl of Clarendon; and one of the world's classics, the diary of Samuel Pepys, was written in cipher.

Whether or not, years later, the Russian Nihilists ever heard of Bacon's definition of the perfect cipher, they certainly followed his precepts. The letter given below is based on a system of secret writing commonly used by the Nihilists.

Arnold dear, it was good news to hear that you have found a job in Paris. Anna hopes you will soon be able to send for her. She's very eager to join you now the children are both well. Sonia

This apparently innocent letter would probably be passed over by the most painstaking censor. Yet it contains a murderous message.

The principle of this type of cryptogram is to take advantage of the peculiarity of handwriting in which all the letters of a word are not joined. The breaks are caused by the lifting of the pen, and often occur in the penmanship of people who have infrequent occasion to write. It will be observed in the note above that the endings of some of the unconnected letters point downwards while others curve upwards. The latter, whether they are the final ending of a word or not, indicate the end of the cipher group. Counting them from left to right, the decipherer takes the number in each group and pairs them, as follows:

ARN—3, OLD—3 (33)

DEARI—5, T—1 (51)

WASGO—5, O—1 (51)

and so on. The numerical message finally reads: 33, 51, 51, 41, 23, 43, 33, 51, 45, 12, 43, 24, 11, 34, 34, 11, 34, 34, 42, 33, 11, 44, 42, 43, 33. The numerical cipher is based on a blocked alphabet such as the Greeks used centuries ago, already described on page 00. By reference to it, it will be seen that 33 = N, 51 = E, 51 = E, 41 = D, and so on.¹

¹The message finally reads: "Need money for assassination."

Cryptography has long been used as a method of communicating secretly with prisoners. In England, during the days of Cromwell, Sir John Trevanion, a cavalier of distinction, having fallen from grace was locked up in Colchester Castle. He had every reason to believe that he would be put to death just as had been his friends and fellow Royalists, Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle. While awaiting his doom, however, he was one day handed the following letter by his jailer.

Worthie Sir John:—Hope, that is ye beste comfort of ye afflicted, cannot much, I fear me, help you now. That I would saye to you, is this only: if ever I may be able to requite that I do owe you, stand not upon asking me. 'Tis not much that I can do: but what I can do, bee ye verie sure I wille. I knowe that, if dethe comes, if ordinary men fear it, it frights not you, accounting it for a high honour, to have such a rewarde of your loyalty. Pray yet that you may be spared this soe bitter, cup. I fear not that you will grudge any sufferings; only if bie submission you can turn them away, 'tis the part of a wise man. Tell me, an if you can, to do for you anythinge that you wolde have done. The general goes back on Wednesday. Restinge your servant to com-

mand.—R. T.

If you do what Sir John did—that is, read the third letter after every punctuation mark—you may not feel the same degree of relief, but you will know that the

PANEL AT EAST END OF CHAPEL SLIDES

The prisoner asked to be allowed to pass an hour in private repentance in the chapel. But apparently being less devout than his jailers believed, he spent the hour not in prayer, but in flight.

Less fortunate and perhaps less quick-witted than Sir John was the Chevalier de Rohan, who was incarcerated in the Bastille in 1674. His accomplice in the crime for which he was imprisoned had died without confessing. De Rohan's friends realized the importance of getting this news to the prisoner secretly. If the chevalier continued to protest his innocence, his acquittal seemed almost certain.

On the evening before his examination, De Rohan received a fresh shirt sent him from outside the prison. On one sleeve he discovered these letters:

MG DULHXCLGU GHJ
YXUJ LM CT ULGC ALJ

The chevalier was up at the first dim light of dawn trying to decipher the meaning. Failing to do so, he confessed and paid with his life—because he

could not decipher the message, which was enciphered by a simple method of substitution, L being represented by M, E by G, and so on:

LE PRISONNIER EST MORT;
IL N'A RIEN DIT.

Modern criminals, as well as those of previous centuries, have recognized the advantages of cipher communication. During the years of prohibition, ships loaded with liquor communicated with bootlegging associates ashore by means of cryptographic wireless messages, in order to outwit the police and the Department of Justice.

André Langie, one of the outstanding cryptanalysts of our time, describes in his exceedingly interesting book on secret writing the case of Pastoure, a notorious bank robber. The chief of the French Secret Service Department gave M. Langie the details of a theft from the Continental Bank. Pastoure, the thief, was not caught until six days after the robbery, and had in the interim hidden the money. Having been sentenced to five years in prison, he demanded permission to write his will almost immediately upon entering the jail. One of the pages of this document contained one hundred forty-four figures closely written together. This aroused suspicion, and the paper was turned over to M. Lan-

gie for decipherment. This expert was able to arrange the digits in their proper cipher groups and then perceived that their letter frequency did not follow that of the French language, as might be expected, but of Latin.

The final decipherment read:
CALVISIUS OPUS CHRON-
OLOGICUM
BIBLIOTHEQUE MUNICI-
PALE

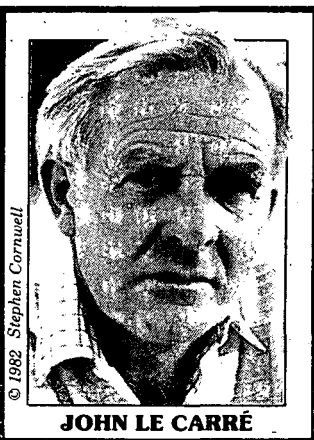
The prisoner had made this memorandum, apparently not trusting his memory over a period of years. He showed his wisdom in choosing an ancient manual of chronology, which could be counted on to remain indefinitely on the shelf, undisturbed. The book was a quarto tome, bound in thick leather, and under this cover M. Langie found a small thin key.

"Picture the astonishment," he writes, "then joy, of the chief! He made me describe point by point the development of my discovery. Then he started on the chase, accompanied by his sleuth hounds. Two days later, on opening my newspaper, I learned that the thirteen hundred thousand francs which had been stolen had been recovered from the strongroom of a bank, where a compartment had been rented for fifteen years by a client about to start to South America!"¹

¹André Langie, *Cryptographie*, Payot et Cie, Paris, 1919.

BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



JOHN LE CARRÉ

Is there anyone among you who doesn't know that John le Carré's real name is David John Moore Cornwell? Well, now you know. You may also be interested to learn that he is indeed British-born, was an intelligence officer in World War II, taught at Eton for a time, and then joined the Foreign Service. (He was assigned to Bonn, the setting for *A Small Town in Germany*.)

All well and good, but what I really wanted to ask is if there is any one of you, dear readers, who hasn't ever *read* John le Carré. Did you escape the brouhaha over *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* when it became an international best-

seller in 1963, when critics—rightly so—were shouting that this single novel had thrillingly turned a harsh spotlight on the darkest corners of the Cold War intelligence underworld? Then, when it was released as a major motion picture starring Richard Burton, was there anyone who avoided reading the book, even then?

And in the ensuing years, when John le Carré followed up *Spy* with five more novels, each one highly praised, each hitting the bestseller lists, did you still manage never to get around to reading one? Or did you, perhaps, begin one of Le Carré's books; only to find it complicated and too difficult to pur-

sue? (Come on, confess. I've had several friends recount this scenario to me in the last few months.)

If so, I'm now going to urge you to go back and find out what you've been missing all these years. There are several compelling reasons for doing so now. For one, PBS has filmed two of the novels to date, superb multi-part dramatizations of Le Carré's world with the wonderful Alec Guinness in the role of George Smiley. With any luck, they'll continue to run and maybe new films will be made, and I must tell you that your pleasure will be increased if you've read the books.

Second, Alfred A. Knopf has just published a hefty volume entitled *The Quest for Karla* that includes three of the George Smiley books: *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*; *The Honourable Schoolboy*; and *Smiley's People*. The omnibus title refers to the Russian master-spy who is George's nemesis—and, many would say, his alter-ego. At \$10.95 this book is a convenient, money-saving introduction to Le Carré.

Finally, there's a new John le Carré novel. (See the review below.) It's bound to hit the charts and quickly become the talk of the town.

You don't want to be left "out in the cold" again, do you?

The profiles in this column have been of books featuring series characters, so that you can postpone the awful moment when you get to the final page. At least, in a series, you have more final pages to anticipate. Critics and scholars have written much about the *oeuvres* of John le Carré, comparing him to Greene, Maugham, and Conrad; exploring the moral implications of the actions of his spies, or the symbolism of his language, or the philosophical stance of the author. I agree with any and all praise tendered Le Carré, but I suggest that you not let reviewers put you off reading his books. If you've had trouble before, begin with *A Murder of Quality*, a straightforward murder mystery with George Smiley doing the detecting. Then try *A Call for the Dead*, the spy novel that introduces George. Note that George takes a back seat in *Spy*, and disappears entirely in *The Looking Glass War* and *A Small Town in Germany*. He comes into his own in the three later novels that are anthologized in *Quest for Karla*.

People who don't ordinarily read mysteries or espionage tales never miss reading a new John le Carré. Those of us who *do* should be grateful that a writer of Le Carré's stature has chosen this genre for his novels.

MYSTERY REVIEWS

John le Carré may have retired George Smiley, but he hasn't, thank heaven, chosen the same path for himself. Instead he's turned from the chilling arenas of the Cold War to the hotter, more topical conflict in the Middle East. At the very heart of **The Little Drummer Girl** (Alfred A. Knopf, \$15.95), in place of the dour George, is a bright, engaging, and talented young British actress named Charlie. Her past is littered with casual lovers and vague left-wing causes, but their dreariness hasn't taken the edge off her natural vitality nor dimmed her tenacious love of life. Her assumed toughness, her refusal to take anything or anyone—herself included—very seriously, are qualities that will endear her to every reader. Thus it is with dread that we watch Charlie march bravely into the fray, a clever and yet impressionable lamb, alone in a pack of hungry political wolves. Love is used to recruit Charlie (and a breathtaking design it is!), but it is hatred that threatens her to the very core: long-lived racial hatred that smolders in the hearts of those who are instructing Charlie, and in those to whom she subsequently runs. No less sophisticated and serpentine than Le Carré's previous novels, *The Little Drummer Girl* is, however, less cerebral and more immediate. The line between the good guys and the bad—always a wavy line in Le Carré's world of intelligence operators—becomes altogether blurred in this new novel. The result is a heartwrenching book that refuses to be set aside, that will leave you stunned by its emotional impact and haunt you even when you've passed the book on to a friend.

On a lighter note is **Murder Goes Mummung**, a mystery as intriguing as its title. In this variation on an old theme—a murderer stalks a houseparty of snowbound guests at Christmas-time—author Alisa Craig brings back Canadian Mountie Madoc Rhys. Madoc, you remember, is the black sheep in a family of titled musical geniuses; he's the one with a tin ear, and a nose for crime. He and his new fiancée, the pretty and sensible Janet, join the festivities at Graylings, a venerable old mansion owned by a slight acquaintance of Madoc's family. But as the squire beams over the yule log at his eccentric tribe, his old granny dies peacefully in her bed upstairs—or was it peacefully? When Aunt Adelaide, known for her uncanny second sight, freezes to death in the snow, Madoc knows he's got a houseful of trouble. There are some extra goodies in this Christmas stocking of a mystery, such as the appearance

of a legendary Phantom Ship, and an irresistible butler who warms to Rhys as a fellow Welshman. It's a good-humored tale with lots of atmosphere and a jolly gang of suspects. (Bantam, \$2.50, 192 pp.)

Piers Paul Read, author of *Alive* and *The Train Robbers*, has masterfully packed betrayal, espionage, and sexual shockers into his new suspense novel. **The Villa Golitsyn** (Avon Books, \$3.50, 208 pp.) is a mansion in Nice where an old Cambridge chum of Simon Milson's lives. Simon—a world-weary survivor of a recent divorce and a jaded British foreign officer—agrees to vacation with Willy once he receives an urgent invitation from Willy's wife Priss. Simon also agrees to his superior's request to do a little work for them at the same time. They want to know which young officer, a decade earlier, betrayed them, and caused a massacre of British soldiers. They tell Simon it was either Willy (who retired shortly after the incident and went abroad), or another young man—a man who's now up for a sensitive post in Washington. So here you have the setup, one Read then twists with the drives, dark secrets, and forbidden passions that haunt men's lives. The resulting novel is a taut character study. The suspense builds as the civilized layers that cloak the souls of the villa's inhabitants are slowly, inexorably, peeled away. This is not a mystery in any ordinary sense. But then this is not an ordinary novel.

June Thompson returns with a new novel in hardcover: **Portrait of Lilith** (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95, 186 pp.). Center stage is the once vital and charismatic painter Max Gibbs, now an aged, impoverished near-invalid loved only by his younger wife Nina. Yet they spend their days happily enough in a ramshackle old house in the English countryside. The trouble comes in the person of Eustace Quinn, owner of a prosperous London art gallery, who visits Max to propose a London one-man show. Nina is thrilled for Max, although the timing is poor: the younger brother whom she reared has shown up again, like a bad penny, and Nina can tell he's in some kind of trouble. The admirable Nina could probably still have coped if someone hadn't murdered the slick art dealer in the Gibbses' back yard, forcing the loyal Nina—as well as the reader—to rely on Thompson's series detective, the unflappable Inspector Rudd, to puzzle out the killer.

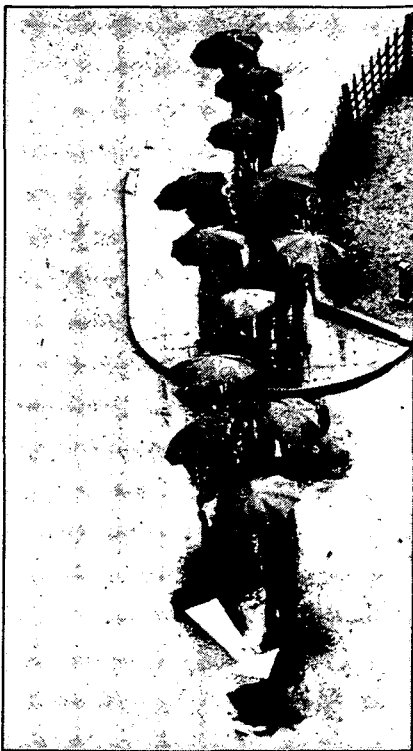
Bantam Books has just released Margaret Yorke's **Grave Matters** in paperback (\$2.50, 176 pp.), so here's a splendid opportunity to introduce yourself to the estimable Dr. Patrick Grant, the young, modern-day English don from Oxford. Grant's a bachelor with a

specialty in Shakespeare, but his affectionate sister Jane can also testify as to his crime-detecting abilities. This book manages to tie together a potpourri of intriguing elements: two murders that looked like accidents, arson, a missing volume of Cicero, a dog-poisoning, an old school photo, and a number of the inhabitants of the pretty village of Meldsmead. There's plenty of action and a slew of likable characters, but readers should also welcome the forays into the Parthenon, the marbled halls of the British Museum, and the hallowed halls and private rooms of St. Mark's College, Oxford.

Gerald Hammond's Keith Calder, a Scottish sleuth who is also a gunsmith by trade, is surrounded in **The Game** by some pretty tough British types. His client is a hard-headed but beautiful "madame," whose co-op call-girl operation has grown to corporation size. Calder is hired as a gun specialist to reconstruct the events of one night in one of the girls' chalets, from a bullet-hole in a chair and a wallful of antique pistols hung for decorative purposes only. This moves along at a brisk clip (pun intended), but it's not for those of you who prefer your profanity and violence offstage. (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95, 168 pp.)

Perhaps you are familiar with writer James Gollin and his fictional band of music-makers from his first book, *The Philomel Foundation*. If so, you'll be pleased to hear that there's a new adventure of The Antiqua Players called **Eliza's Galiardo** (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95, 180 pp.) that's so much fun I've vowed to seek out the earlier book. Alan French loosely heads up five young people who play old music on antiquated instruments, and there's lots of good stuff about touring, practicing, transcribing ancient music, and then—finally—playing "the big hall." But there's also a keen mystery and some thrills, centering around an old manuscript that may have belonged to the young Queen Elizabeth I. It has belonged to a small religious order since the early sixteenth century, but they are now forced to sell it to raise survival funds. The head of the order approaches Alan with the idea that the Antiqua Players perform and record the music for a year, providing time for the experts to verify its authenticity as well as publicize the eventual sale. All well and good—until, that is, somebody nabs the prize. This has likable characters, a good plot, credible romance and danger, dollops of musical knowhow, and nary a false note to it. I hope Gollin keeps writing up the Antiquas' adventures.

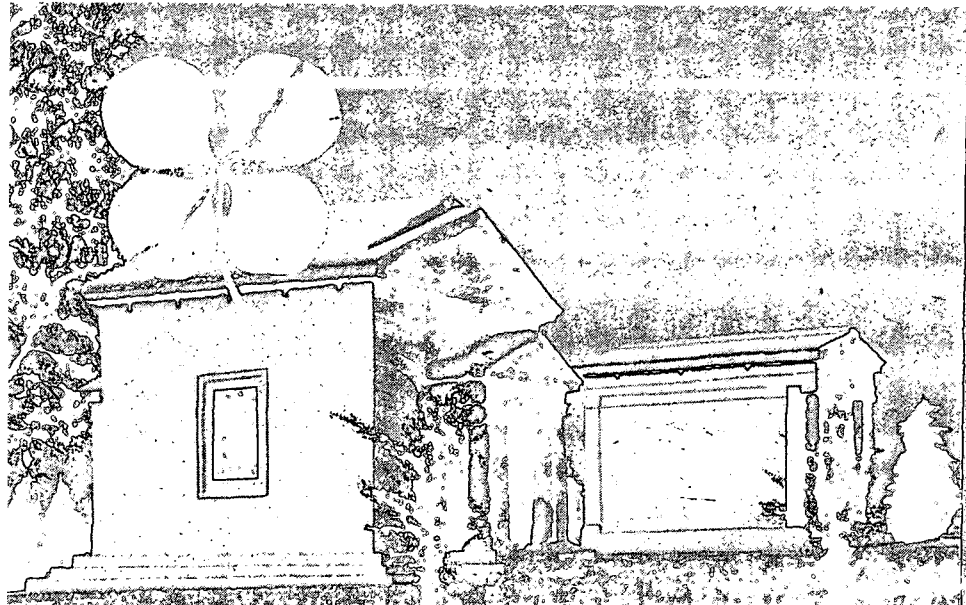
THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



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Now, where do you suppose *they're* going? We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Box 300, 380 Lexington Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017.

The winning entry for the January Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 160.



FICTION

Libby's Luck

by T. Robin Kantner

As the coffin thumped into the bottom of the hole, my Aunt Rachel, assisted by one of her daughters, walked unsteadily up and dropped in a handful of red Georgia clay. I filed up behind other family members and did the same. Brushing my hands off, I stepped back from the

grave, relieved that the ritual was over. Now for the rental car, the Atlanta airport, Detroit, and home.

I'd hoped to avoid meeting Libby, but she was waiting for me in the passenger seat of my rental car.

Without a word I opened the driver's side door, sat half in

Illustration by E.T. Steadman



and half out of the car, and stared out across the cemetery as the black Cadillac hearse started to pull away. Distant relatives wandered slowly by my car, socializing in their north Georgia accents, and in the distance a backhoe fired up, getting ready to fill in the grave. I said, "You have a sudden at-

tack of family feeling, or what?"

"He was *my* uncle, too," she retorted. Libby Perkins Gillespie was soberly dressed in a severe blue business suit and a floppy blue hat. Back when we had a family, it was said that Libby had gotten all the looks. Seeing her now for the first time in seven years—though

we lived but twenty miles apart—it was evident to me that she'd peaked early and faded fast. She was just in her mid-thirties, a few years younger than me, but she was fleshier in the face, the neck, the waist. Our daddy would have said she looked like she'd been rode hard and put away wet.

I wrestled my keys out of my slacks pocket. "Nice talking to you, kid."

"Wait, Ben," she said in vintage Libby: demanding, imperious, owed things. "I need a ride to the airport."

"You can go back the same way you came up: Unless there's something else you want."

There it was, in her eyes, the Look: a slant of desperation, uncertainty, beaten-down hope. Transfigured from my sister to, by God, a potential client. She pursed her lips, then said in a hard, uncaring voice, "I've got a job for you. You still do that . . . investigating work, don't you?"

Cars were moving past us on the gravel lane. In the distance, toward Uncle Andrew's grave, the backhoe bayed and roared. I eased back in my seat, pulling my legs in, staring straight ahead, wanting a smoke, a drink, and solitude. "I check up on stuff from time to time," I answered.

A pause. "Well," she asked abruptly, "will you take the job?"

"Could be, depends."

"Depends on *what*? I'm your sister."

"What the job is, and whether you can afford two fifty a day plus expenses."

"Oh, the money's no problem—"

"Maybe we can do business, then." I put the key in the ignition.

"As for the job," she went on in her directorial tone, "I want you to find something for me. It's—"

"Just save it a while." I fired up the engine.

"I've lost my luck," she said softly as I put the car in gear and began rolling down the wooded north Georgia lane.

Not even Libby could make the day worse. I'd taken the red-eye down from Detroit that morning, made the two-hour drive up to Rome, endured a lengthy funeral ritual, which included a joyfully macabre three-hour church service, a five-mile-per-hour drive to the cemetery (including a stop at Uncle Andrew's plain frame house—"taking him home for the last time," the locals called it), and an hour-long graveside service.

Even if my Uncle Dan hadn't asked me to represent him, I'd have come anyway. There weren't many of the old folks left. My daddy, supposedly the most robust, had died of emphysema back in '63. Now Uncle Andrew, a big, brawny, vigorous customer at seventy-nine, had been carried off when a tree he was felling twisted around and got him. Of the three old guys, that left just Uncle Dan: the oldest, supposedly the frailest, who'd survived air combat over France in World War I, and the murderous auto labor union wars of the thirties, and thirty-five years on the line at Rouge. He should have bought the farm long before his brothers, which proves that death makes about as much sense as everything else.

Libby and I made the I-75 in good time, and I pushed the whiny, thumping, capricious rental car to its top speed, which seemed to be seventy miles per hour downhill in a tailwind. Libby slumped in the passenger seat, taking belts from a silver flask, chain-smoking tawny brown cigarettes, making small talk to which I replied with grunts. The stink of liquor and tobacco smoke filled the car, and I kept my window cracked and concentrated on the road.

We'd passed Marietta, on the

outskirts of Atlanta, when I asked reluctantly, "Okay, so what's this you've lost?"

I felt her gaze on me. She said, as if it was the most logical thing in the world, "My luck."

"G'wan. Jeez. I mean, get real for once."

She capped her flask and said stiffly, "Quit grinning. I'm totally serious. I've had it for years and now it's gone and I want it back."

"For this you don't need me, kid. Go out and buy yourself a rabbit's foot or a four-leaf clover or—"

"Damn it!" she exploded. "You going to sit there and smirk, or take a job for which I'm willing to pay you well?"

"Oh, I'll go for the money," I said lazily. "I don't do spec work. And, what the hell. We got half an hour before we get to the airport. So enlighten me with the facts, if any. In order, please, and from the beginning."

She lighted another tawny cigarette with her green Bic disposable lighter and said, "Very well. Back in high school—"

"Oh, jeez."

"Back in high school," she repeated in a hard voice, "in my freshman year, I, uh . . . I goofed off in my last-quarter economics class and failed it. I had to

have the credit to be promoted, and the school offered me the chance to take a special equivalency test. I took it on a Saturday morning after having been out the night before till five o'clock and coming home drunk. I blew the test, Ben, I've always known I blew it, figured the jig was up. But when the score came I had something like an eighty-six. I *passed* it. With a *B*, for God's sake."

"So," I shrugged, "maybe you're smarter when you're hung over."

She ignored me and went on stolidly. "I got into Michigan. Got involved in some of the usual student activities. Parties, boys—"

"Drugs," I suggested. I'd left home by then, but I remembered.

She stayed silent for a long moment. We were making the sharp bend onto the I-75/85 Connector in downtown Atlanta. Then she said, "None of this better get out."

"Not to worry," I said easily. "As eager as I am to make a buck, I suspect the publishing world isn't panting for juicy tidbits about the life and times of Elizabeth Perkins Gillespie."

She went on in a terse, clipped voice, "We were in a house on Fifth Street in Ann Arbor one night, it was '65, right around Thanksgiving. And we got

busted, about ten or eleven of us. Taken to jail. But then the police released me. Just me. The others were tried and convicted."

Though concentrating on the heavy traffic, I shot her a quick glance. "Why'd they let you go?"

"I don't know, and I didn't ask. Just my luck, I guess. Then, while I was in college, I kept running low on money, you know how that goes, but money would just turn up. Cash. I'd find it on the sidewalks, in my textbooks. A ten here, a twenty there. My luck again."

I snorted, but my heart wasn't in it.

"After college," she went on after taking a deep drag on her cigarette, "I got a job with Agate Enterprises. A year later Retail Credit bought them out and pink-slipped everybody. I'll never forget it, I was totally devastated, didn't know what to do. Got home and a man from Nautilus called. You know, the computer company. They had a job for me. I started the next day. I'd never heard of them, never applied, but... it was my luck again, just in the nick of time."

I really had to pay attention to the driving now; Atlanta's Downtown Connector is an old, poorly constructed, chronically packed stretch of hair-raising

highway. But Libby's story, which I had never heard, was starting to get to me. "What else?"

I felt her eyes on me, trying to decipher my vacant expression. She said defiantly, "I got—got involved with one of the executives. He was married. We tried to keep it quiet, but . . . people can tell. Rumors began going around. Word was, I was going to get the boot. Instead he was transferred overseas. The rumors died, and I never heard about it again."

I kept the little car twisting and turning through the traffic and, at the same time, fished a small cork-tipped cigar out of my shirt pocket. Libby lighted it for me with her Bic. Disbelieving, I said between puffs, "They . . . transferred *him* . . . and left . . . *you* alone?"

"Yes," she said rapidly, closing the sale, "and that's not all. I married Steve, and we decided to buy a house in Ann Arbor. I wanted something really grand, but the prices were just too high. Looked like we'd have to buy outside the city. Then our agent, Chris Crandall, got a call about a place in the Georgetown subdivision. Perfect, and a great price. We saw it, made an offer, and it was accepted, just like that."

We passed the Capitol Interchange with its state govern-

ment buildings and the stadium. It was cloudy, getting hotter, threatening rain. Libby suddenly uncorked her flask again, drained it, and shoved it clumsily into her handbag. "We wanted a big house for children," she said, her voice shakier, "but it turned out I was infertile. Detached fallopian tubes, if it matters, congenital, irreversible. So we looked into adoption. The agencies poked and pried and asked embarrassing questions, then approved us with a big fat smile and put us on a three-year waiting list. Three years! We were . . . we were in despair, Ben. We wanted it so bad."

Considering the number of fast years Libby had spent trying not to get pregnant, I found this infertility thing ironic, but kept the observation to myself. "So what great miracle of circumstance happened this time?"

"A private adoption agency called me. Called themselves Outplacement Associates. They had a child, an infant, available. Did we want it? *Did we!*" Her laugh was almost crazy. "Little Stevie. It was my luck again, Ben, my luck came through for me."

I bent the car right on the I-85 highway, on the home stretch for the airport. Libby stayed silent for a long time, staring

blankly straight ahead. I blew a stream of cigar smoke out the window and said, "Well, it's all very interesting, but don't give me this about luck. There's no such thing." She stayed stone silent. A sign ahead said HARTSFIELD ATLANTA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT; I made the loop for the departing passenger area at the terminal. "So, what makes you think your ... 'luck' ... is gone?"

Seeing the terminal coming up, Libby clumsily straightened herself, tugged at her suit, messed with her hair. She said in a scratchy, drained voice, "Oh ... Steve's leaving me. Taking little Stevie with him. The work is—is going sour. Bad evaluations. Political problems. Want to know any more? I've got big tax problems, they're auditing me back to day one. I've been nailed and convicted three times in a month for moving traffic violations. That never happened before, they were always thrown out of court. ... For months now I've been waiting for my luck to kick back in. Maybe it never will, maybe it's gone for good. But I have to know what happened to it."

I stopped the car at the curb by the terminal. A squad of sky-caps moved toward the car, and I waved them back.

I turned to Libby. "I want

three days' money up front."

Lips pressed, she nodded, went into her purse for her check-book, and began writing.

"No guarantees," I said as she handed me the check.

"I understand." Having unburdened herself, she looked smaller now, less domineering.

Not that it made any difference. I folded the blue check, stuck it in my shirt pocket, and said, "I don't start till this has cleared, you follow?"

A spark flashed in her eyes, but I held up a hand. "That's our policy for first-time customers. Now beat it. I've got to unload this crate."

She opened the car door, got out clumsily, then bent down and, in a foolish and belated attempt at camaraderie, said, "We're probably on the same Delta. Meet me in the bar near the gate?"

"Don't count on it." I reached across and pulled the door shut. I didn't want to see her any more; I had to get rid of the car. I had to think through Libby's problem. Weed out the "luck" mumbo-jumbo. Get a feel on how to find the fix. Because, I've learned, when you think the fix is in, it usually is.

Seemed to me the smartest thing to do was to follow the path of least resistance, so I started

with that strange Ann Arbor drug bust, one of the fishier elements in Libby's checkered past. First step: the records.

Getting into the records isn't too tough if you know what to ask for, whom to ask it of, and have leverage over the askee. The "what" was obvious; the "who" was Lud Danzig, an Ann Arbor assistant district attorney; and the leverage stemmed from my having alerted Danzig a few months back that a high-stakes poker game he was frequenting was about to be busted by the state police. This saved Danzig from a big, ugly, public mess. I could take his gratitude for granted. There was lots of mileage to be squeezed out of that little marker.

After doing some checking, Danzig informed me there was a record of Libby's arrest, but no indication of why she wasn't prosecuted. He suggested that I interview the arresting officer to get some insight. Only problem—a "slight" one, Danzig put it dryly—was that the officer, Darryl Rockecharlie, had been dismissed from the force in '80, having become, to use Danzig's delicate, lawyerlike phrase, "a procurer, extortionist, strong-arm, and broken-down drunken sleaze." There was a bench warrant out for his arrest, and though Rockecharlie was thought to be in Ann Arbor,

Danzig indicated that the warrant was small potatoes and the lawmen weren't lying awake nights worrying about it.

I put my friend Ron Narco on the problem. Ron's a fiftyish holdover from the drug culture of the sixties and looks the part: thin, gaunt, bluejeaned, whiskered, long-haired. He's a smart, savvy street man, well acquainted with the dark corners and shadow people of Ann Arbor. It took him just a couple of days to turn up Rockecharlie for me, and we met him at the Christmas Cafe on Washington Street, a real good place to get knifed if you're interested in that sort of thing.

The bar was dark and packed and hot and noisy. Ron and I sat close together on one side of a wallet-sized table; Rockecharlie dominated the other side, hunched over, dressed in a dirty brown sports jacket and open necked wrinkled white shirt. He had big square cop hands, a big square cop face, short, dirty-blond cop hair, and disolute ex-cop twitches, trembles, eyebags, and smell. Ron and I drank beer; Rockecharlie augmented his with repeated double shots of straight Heaven Hill which I obligingly paid for.

Rockecharlie did a disappearing act with a shot of liquor, waved blearily for the tough young barmaid, and turned to

us, a spark of dim awareness and apprehension showing on his craggy, mottled face. "Yeah, I recollect that. Lot of years ago. Big bust." Rote words muttered through puffed lips, eyes dead.

I said, very distinctly, "There was a girl. Elizabeth Perkins. She was released on the same night without being charged. Nothing in the records says why. That's what I want to know."

Back by the bar a shoving match began, noticed by perhaps one percent of the noisy patrons. The juke box started pounding out The Who's "Mamma's Got a Squeeze Box." Rockecharlie's eyes went to slits. He hooked a fresh shot of Heaven Hill from the barmaid on the fly, got outside it with a gulp, and said, "She was took care of."

I leaned closer, perhaps pushing too hard. "So give over."

Rockecharlie's massive head trembled left and right. "Nooo, sir. Nooo way. You don't know what you're dealing with." The pushing match by the bar ripped outward when one of the contenders gave the other an elbow in the throat. I glanced around for bouncers and couldn't identify any; hell, aside from Ron, everybody in the joint looked like a bouncer.

Going for my wallet—which I'd tucked into my boot, as I

usually do in such serene surroundings—I got out a fifty and held it up by the corner. "I pay my way, Darryl. Give me the name."

Someone splatted on the deck not far from us, scattering standing patrons. Rockecharlie eyed the General Grant and shook his head again, indifferently. I got out a hundred and held it up instead. "Doubt you ever paid your snitches this good, Darryl," I said in a normal voice, which probably wasn't audible more than twenty inches from us.

The sprawled patron crawled to his feet and leaped for someone at the bar. Rockecharlie shook his head again, bored. Sometimes money is enough leverage, sometimes you need more, perhaps a dramatic gesture. I took the hundred in both hands, tore it in half diagonally, stuffed one half in Rockecharlie's shirt pocket behind his crumpled pack of Winstons, and handed the other half to Ron.

"Call this a demonstration of sincerity," I said easily. "It's like I already spent the money, see? But you can't have it without giving me a name. Think about it. My friend Ron, here, will hold the other half."

A sick grin flickered on Darryl Rockecharlie's face. He rose slowly, turned, and plowed his

way to the door like a carrier cutting thirty knots in medium swells. Ron and I got to our feet just as another body, hurled out of everywhere, crashed into our table and knocked it to the floor, giving me a lapful of wet beer and Ron a case of bruised toes. We danced around the mess and headed for the door, for some reason laughing so hard it made my throat hurt.

I took Ron's arm as we stepped out onto the Washington Street sidewalk and whispered instructions in a low, urgent voice.

He grinned wickedly at me. "That's mean, Ben."

"Yeah, but pretty, ain't it?" I slapped him on the arm, turned, and headed for my car.

It goes without saying that I looked pretty shabby and smelled even worse as I headed over to the office of Chris Crandall, agent for Wombwell Realty, on, and near the, Stadium. It was past dark when I got there, but the office was still open.

Crandall turned out to be female, a short, well-rounded looker in her late thirties, with longish straight chestnut hair, smoldering olive-skinned Mediterranean features, and that bright, hard-nosed demeanor your typical real estate agent gets when in the presence of, to use their saying, "live meat."

When she realized I wasn't buying, selling, or even remotely interested in real estate in Ann Arbor or anywhere else, she settled back behind her practically vacant mahogany desk and answered my questions sullenly, shooting glances at the phone that never rang the whole time I was there.

I wasn't surprised that she remembered Libby's Georgetown house deal. Any agent worth a damn who's worked a territory for any length of time can usually recite from memory the purchase-and-sale history, not to mention the features (pro and con), of practically any house in the area.

"It's a beautiful place on Brentwood Court," she told me. "The Gillespies got a hell of a deal. Too good to be true, actually."

Kind of a recurring theme. "Well, how come?"

"Luck," she answered with an elegant shrug. "They'd been looking for months. I did my best, but frankly, they just didn't have the bucks to buy what they wanted. Ann Arbor taste on an East Ypsilanti budget. Then this equity-owned deal came up."

"Equity-owned?"

She glanced at the silent phone again, then reached into a desk drawer and came out with an Eve cigarette that I

lighted for her. "FTO. The real estate subsidiary of Fantastico."

This wasn't much help. Fantastico's a multi-national conglomerate, so immense that some almanacs quite seriously list it among the nations of the world.

Crandall took a long, practiced pull on her cigarette, her eyes sizing me up, and said, "It happened virtually overnight. FTO called me to say they were listing this house. I thought the asking price was some kind of mistake; fifteen, twenty bills easy under market value. No mistake. I showed it to the Gillespies right away—before it was even officially listed. Libby and Steve signed an offer on the spot. I presented it the next morning. It was accepted by noon. And we closed at the end of the week."

I eyed Crandall, wondering if this faint Fantastico trail could lead me anywhere, and doubting it.

Crandall went on, after an almost challenging look at the phone, "It's a crazy business I'm in. Equity-owned homes usually go for a tad below market value, but that's all, and then not until they've sat there a long time. And equity companies are notorious hagglers, especially FTO. Except in this case. They priced it way below

market, going in. We offered a few bills less just on principle. And they accepted, no counter-offer, no nothing. I don't know about your work, Mr. Perkins, but sometimes things happen in real estate that make no sense."

Tell me about it.

I spent most of the next day chasing my tail and getting more and more peeved.

Item: no one at FTO, Fantastico's real estate subsidiary, had anything constructive to tell me about Libby's house deal. No one there was involved in it—or would admit to it—and the records were, as they put it, "confidential."

Item: I hadn't heard from Ron all day about the Rockecharlie setup.

Item: Nautilus, the computer company that had mysteriously offered Libby a job just in the nick of time, and where she later had an illicit affair for which she suffered no consequences, no longer existed. At least it was in no phone or city directory for the Detroit metropolitan area.

Item: the people at Outplacement Associates, the private adoption agency that came across with a fresh kid for Libby in record time, were about as loquacious as G. Gordon Liddy. After a frustrating and fruit-

less half-hour morning meeting with some tight-lipped flunky, I went to the office of my friend Carole Somers, a lawyer specializing in women's issues, and enlisted her eager help in getting around Outplacement's defenses.

Having done all of that, and tired finally of beating my feet on the street and my head on the proverbial brick wall, I repaired to my Norwegian Wood apartment in Belleville. Carole arrived about a half hour after I did, dragging along her four-year-old son Will; they were staying at my place for a few days while the floors in their Berkley house were being re-finished.

Shoes shucked, bare feet propped on the coffee table and some good Seger music playing in the background, I sat on the couch nursing a Stroh's and smoking a cigar and fuming.

"I did the best I could, Ben," Carole said in a resigned voice. She was at the other end of the couch, dressed elegantly in a white turtleneck top and slacks, her blonde Lady Diana haircut pristine in the late afternoon lamplight. Across the room, her boy Will, a stocky, big-boned blond kid, sat on the floor in front of the TV, half-watching Scooby-Doo.

"Tap city, huh?" I asked flatly.

"Turns out I know Annie

Wyatt, Outplacement's director, pretty well," Carole said, "but she's earnest as hell, straight as they come. No information available on the Gillespie adoption. None whatsoever."

"Aaah," I snarled, biting my cigar overly hard.

"Hey," Carole said in a consoling voice, "I know it's your sister involved, but lighten up."

"Sister, hell. It's frustrating for professional reasons only. That's it, pal." I puffed on my cigar for a minute. "You know what else sticks in my throat? This Nautilus business. Companies don't just up and disappear." I grabbed my phone, pulled it over to me, thought for a minute, and dialed. When the Com-Share operator answered, I asked for Jim Boddy, and was put on wait.

I turned to Carole and said distinctly, "I don't like Libby. Never have. There's no law says I have to, either." Jim Boddy came on the line. "Hey, old buddy," I greeted him, "Perkins here. You being such a computer maven and all, maybe you can help me out. . . ."

After I gave him the background on Nautilus, Jim talked for three or four minutes. Will wandered out of the room to use the bathroom and came back with his zipper down. Carole fixed him while I absently

watched, listened to Jim, and smoked my cigar.

When Jim was done, I thanked him, arranged a bowling date for the following week (seventh frame winner buys the beer), and hung up.

Carole, ever the shrink-cum-social-worker, said to me as Will futzed with her shoes next to us, "But Libby's your family."

I drank my beer and said sharply, "That's just a biological accident!" Will went wide-eyed and headed into the kitchen. "My family isn't the Ozzie-and-Harriet, hey-Dad-where's-Mom, two point three kids routine, but this." I gestured at myself and at her. "Single man, divorced woman and her child who live under the same roof from time to time. The family of the eighties."

In the silence, Will came back into the room, somber-faced, and handed me a fresh, ice-cold bottle of Stroh's. I took it, laughing, grabbed the boy by the back of the head and gave him a clumsy squeeze.

Carole smiled and changed the subject smoothly. "What'd your buddy tell you?"

"Oh, yeah. Nautilus was bought out by PBB. That's a subsidiary of none other than Fantastico."

Her eyes narrowed. "Oo."

"Yeah. What you might call

a pattern is emerging, or something." We sat in the silence for long minutes; the boy went back to the TV and began doing some Muppets. I had one of those intuitive flashes. "What about this Outplacement Associates, anyhow? Where does *their* money come from?"

"Damned if I know," Carole shrugged.

"Well," I said, handing her the telephone, "call your friend and find out."

"Ben," she said patiently, "Annie said she couldn't divulge—"

I fixed her with a stare and said inexorably, "It's very simple. Call her up and ask her if Fantastico's one of their funders."

She reflected, said "Ohhhkay," dialed, and talked. After a minute's conversation she hung up without changing expression. "Yup," she said to me.

I rubbed my hands together, thinking furiously about patterns and fixes and trying to decide on my next move. It was, however, made for me; the phone rang. I picked it up. "Perkins."

"Hey, Ben, this is Ron." Voice full of big news. "I'm over here at the jail. Rockecharlie got busted an hour ago. In Ypsi in River Town. Ypsi police rendered him over here."

"Where are you calling from?" I asked, reaching for my dead

cigar and relighting it. Carole winced; even when my cigars are fresh she refers to them as Rolled Rat.

"Washtenaw County Jail, Ben," Ron answered helpfully.

"I gathered that. *Where* in the jail?" I asked.

"Oh, sorry. Bail and Bonds section, the waiting room. They won't let me in any farther and, frankly—"

"Listen to me. I want you to go over to the county building and find the office of Lud Danzig. He's an assistant D.A. Don't go in, just wait outside. I'll be in touch."

"Rog." He hung up.

I reached out, mashed the cradle button down, and held it. Carole said, smiling, "I don't think I care for that sly look on your face."

"Ohhh," I said lightly, "it's leverage, kid; just leverage." I punched out a number and raised Danzig, who squealed that he was just leaving for the day. "C'mon, Lud, this won't take but fifteen minutes," I said. "I heard tell my old friend Darryl Rockecharlie is now an unwilling guest in that mountain of rock you call a jail over there."

"I heard tell of that, too," Danzig said. "What a coincidence. I turned you on to this clown earlier in the week, and casually mentioned a half-assed

bench warrant out for him, and the Ypsi police get an anonymous tip on his whereabouts and collar him. Wouldn't you call that a real odd coincidence, Ben?"

"Life is strange, I always said that. What's on his menu?"

Danzig cleared his throat. "In an amazing burst of administrative speed, his file just landed on my desk. Let me see. Oh boy, we've cracked a *big* one. Scofflaw. Couple dozen unpaid parking tickets. Plus damaging government property; seems he smashed up a Denver boot one of our officers affixed to the wheel of his car."

"A real enemy of the state, huh? Any problem losing the whole thing if he comes across with the information I need?"

In my mind's eye I could see Danzig biting his lips. He grunted, "I didn't want the damn case to begin with. Scofflaws aren't exactly high up on my list of law-enforcement priorities."

"'Kay," I replied. "How about spiriting Rockecharlie into your office right now? And there's an aging hippe-type lounging in your hall, friend of mine named Ron Narco, get him in there, too. And call me back when they're there."

"Anything to be of service, Mr. Perkins," Danzig said dryly, and hung up.

The rest was anticlimactic. Carole and I chatted tensely for ten minutes while the boy watched his Muppets, and then the phone rang again. I had Danzig put Rockecharlie on. The ex-cop was belligerent and half in the bag. I said gently, "You remember the question I asked you the other day? Now I want a name. You give it over, and you walk away from this in five minutes, guaranteed."

A long, long pause. Then, almost a whisper: "Hooker. Al Hooker. One of *them* Hookers. I didn't ask why, I just took the money."

"You done good, Darryl. Put Danzig on." He did so. "Spring him. Squares our account, buddy." Danzig didn't answer, but I knew he'd come through for me as I'd come through for him. "Give me Ron. . . . Ron? Give Darryl the other half of that C-note. And thanks, pal."

I hung up slowly, relighted my dead cigar, and stared off into space. On TV the old men were heckling Milton Berle and Fozzie Bear. Carole asked me, "So is it done?"

"I didn't know she even knew him," I said dreamily. "Hell, he and I were the same age, three years ahead of her in school." I got up, walked in a trance to my bookshelves, selected the 1961 yearbook, and brought it back to Carole. Leafed through

to Seniors. Hooker, Alvin Marcus. Round, acne-farm moon-face, thick glasses, protruding lips, perfect teeth. Under his name, his activities: Library Club, Band, Chorus, and Counseling Office Assistant.

"Do you *believe* this?" I asked of no one in particular, leaning back.

Carole flipped farther in the yearbook, then stopped. "You know, you're ten times better looking now than you were then," she observed.

"Good clean living," I answered.

"So," she said, folding her hands together expectantly, "you going to tell me what you found out?"

"In a minute." I reached for the phone one last time, picked up the receiver and stared at it, wondering briefly if anyone in my line of work had ever broken a case by telephone before. Then I punched out Libby's number.

You forget when you're in it that Elmwood Cemetery is totally surrounded by the city of Detroit. It's an enormous, rolling plot of heavily wooded land, studded with the elaborate graves of forgotten Detroit and Michigan *prominente*, and bisected by the last remaining segment of Bloody Run, the site

of a decisive battle in the French and Indian War, which happened before my time.

Libby, wearing jeans, stylishly slim boots, and a snug brown leather jacket, was waiting beside her black Ford Econoline van at the site I'd specified, deep in the cemetery. I greeted her, said "Let's go," and hiked from the lane up through tall grass, threading my way among the old gravestones, mausoleums, and trees.

"What are we doing here?" Libby asked angrily, giving the area a distasteful look.

"I never knew you dated Al Hooker," I said.

"Al Hooker?" Libby said, startled. "Don't be silly, I never dated him. Well, we danced one time at a school dance. And he used to study with me in the library." She went silent. I didn't look at her as we walked. I felt the moisture in the long grass soaking my shoes and cuffs. Up ahead I saw the bank of Bloody Run, it wasn't far now. Libby went on in an indulgent, reminiscent voice, "Oh, he had some kind of weird crush on me for a while. He actually wrote poetry for me. Real sappy, embarrassing stuff. I finally sat him down and told him to back off. Poor little schnook."

We got to the bank. Bloody Run trickled by down below. Across the creek was more cem-

etery. Off to the left, sticking out of the bank, was an enormous mausoleum of white granite, facing the creek. It was surrounded by a flagstone patio interspersed with ugly, pollution-pitted statues of insanely grinning gods in robes. There were also a couple of low stone benches, for the convenience of meditating mourners, I supposed. The mausoleum, a two- or three-generation-capacity job, had a dark, sober, stained glass window on each side and a heavily locked, greenish brass, barred door on the front. Above the door was the legend, cut deep into the stone: HOOKER.

I looked at Libby, who was staring blankly at it. "Come on." We walked along the bank, angling down toward the mausoleum. "The fact that Hooker was out of a big bucks family didn't matter to you, huh?"

She said uncertainly, watching her footing, "Believe it or not, Ben, I'm not a complete mercenary." We got to the flagstone patio. Weeds leaped grotesquely from the cracks between the stones. The air was absolutely silent. Libby suddenly said sharply, "Ben?"

"Yeah, kid."

She looked pale. Her hands were balled into fists in the pockets of her leather jacket. "What does this have to do with my . . . luck?"

I tilted my head toward the mausoleum. "You asked me to find it for you. Well, it's in there. Help yourself."

She swallowed hard. "This is crazy."

"Al Hooker," I said distinctly, reciting the results of my morning's research while staring past her at the muddy creek. "His daddy founded Hooker Controls, pioneers in electronic relays back in the thirties. Made out like bandits in World War II. Gobbled up by Fantastico in 1963."

"So?" she asked in a shrill voice. "What does that—"

"He's in *there*, Libby. Has been nearly a year now. Eaten alive by liver cancer."

She stepped toward the mausoleum door, then stopped, frozen in place.

I said, "Number one, your house deal. That property was owned by Fantastico. Number two, Outplacement Associates, your adoption agency. Funded by Fantastico. Number three, Nautilus, which hired you sight unseen when you needed a job. Owned by Fantastico. I don't know about the cash you kept finding, and your fixed traffic tickets; you decide for yourself."

"Fact is that Mr. Al Hooker, thanks to his family name, was

an executive with Fantastico. He had a fancy title and plenty of money. But like a lot of nepotism deals, he was a figurehead in the company, with no real work to do. So he apparently made it his business to watch out for you. You, Libby. A hard habit to break, since he'd worked in the counselor's office in high school and probably rigged your score on that economics equivalency test. And since he bribed an Ann Arbor police officer to spring you from that drug bust in '65."

She backed up very, very slowly and sat down on one of the granite mourner benches and stared at the mausoleum.

"It wasn't luck at all, Libby. It was just a poor little schnook with money and connections who must have liked you pretty good."

I turned and headed up the bank, moving as fast as I could in the slippery footing. I heard nothing behind me. When I reached the top of the bank, I stopped and looked back. Libby had her head down, fingers steepled over her forehead, not making a sound.

Then I started back toward her. I wasn't through with her after all. She owed me expense money.

UNSOLVED

by C. R. Wylie, Jr.

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the July issue.

Three men were once arrested for a crime which beyond a shadow of a doubt had been committed by one of them. Preliminary questioning disclosed the curious fact that one of the suspects was a highly respected judge, one just an average citizen, and one a notorious crook. In what follows they will be referred to as Brown, Jones, and Smith, though not necessarily respectively. Each man made two statements to the police, which were in effect

Brown: I didn't do it.
 Jones didn't do it.
Jones: Brown didn't do it.
 Smith did it.
Smith: I didn't do it.
 Brown did it.

Further investigation showed, as might have been expected, that both statements made by the judge were true, both statements made by the criminal were false, and of the two statements made by the average man one was true and one was false.

*Which of the three men was the judge, the average citizen, the crook?
And who committed the crime?*

Taken from 101 Puzzles in Thought & Logic by C. R. Wylie, Jr., © 1957 by Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.

See page 154 for the solution to the May puzzle.

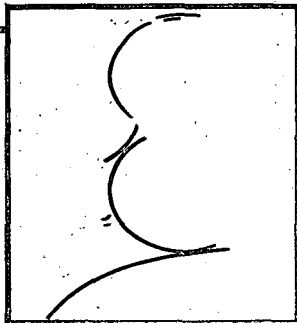


Blue Thunder, the ominous armed helicopter in the movie of the same name, starring Roy Scheider and Malcolm McDowell, hovers over downtown Los Angeles.

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MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



Blue Thunder is a movie mostly about an unusually well-equipped helicopter. No one can deny that the result is far more interesting than if the subject had been an ordinary helicopter. Nevertheless, the critic cannot help noticing there are certain built-in limitations here.

The mystery has to do with why an advanced, armed machine with spying capabilities has been sent for testing to the Los Angeles police department helicopter squad. Police pilot Roy Scheider, a tough Vietnam vet, decides to find out what's really going on. When he learns too much, his life is put in danger. He can save himself and, it seems, the institutions and freedoms of the United States of America, only by stealing the helicopter.

Its name, by the way, is "Blue Thunder"; Scheider's name is just plain "Murphy."

The police department and the air force go after Blue Thunder with everything they've got; and the resulting dogfight is both intricate and exciting. In a nice touch, although there are bailouts, fiery crashes, and much firing at civilians, only the villain gets killed. He is played by Malcom McDowell, who starred in *A Clockwork Orange*. It is never explained how this Englishman happens to have become an American army helicopter pilot.

Over the years the detective hero has gone from taking on the world with his fists, to carrying a gun, to using James Bond-like fancy equipment and special cars, to flying a helicopter. Some things, though, never

change. Somewhere in Hollywood there must be a sheet of paper outlining the rules for making action and detective thrillers. Most of these rules, of course, come direct from Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. The investigator, whether a private eye or a policeman, must be a loner. Something in his past has made him cynical (for Roy Scheider it's Vietnam, which has also given him repeating headaches); he has casual relationships with women, one of whom really cares for him; he gets knocked around by thugs, after which he makes one visit to his bachelor pad; here he scrounges food from an ill-stocked refrigerator and gets some sleep. He has a comic sidekick; the sidekick is killed; the killing makes our hero get serious. He starts to take chances, even to stealing a helicopter, but his headlong bravery leads to his breaking the case.

So long as the detective hero can keep up with technological advance, it seems a pretty sure bet he will always be with us.

In **Kamikaze '89** the Germans demonstrate that they

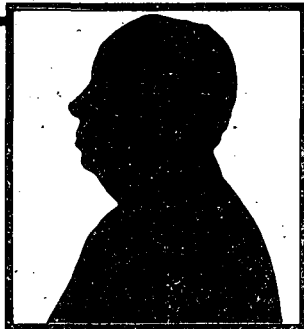
are no better than the French at imitating the American hardboiled detective genre. The setting is the future, as in *Blade Runner* (reviewed in the Mid-September AHMM), but except for some slightly modified cars, the world looks the same as it does at present. When the police detective hero investigates a series of bomb threats against the giant office building that controls the State's television programs, he uncovers a nationwide mind-control conspiracy.

(Those viewers interested in evacuation techniques will have the opportunity of seeing the office building emptied twice.)

Kamikaze '89 is an adaptation of Swedish author Per Wahlöö's respectable mystery novel, *Death on the 31st Floor*. To the book's credit, it had nothing to do with Orwellian mind-control. Nor did its police detective, Jansen, inexplicably deck himself out in a full-length leopardskin outfit. The new, swinging Jansen is played by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the German movie writer and director who died some time after shooting this movie.

FRAMES OF REFERENCE

by Peter Christian



Alfred Hitchcock, in the first years of his success as an American director, provided the introduction to a collection of Eric Ambler spy novels. Curiously, Hitchcock never filmed an Ambler book; nonetheless, he praised Ambler's skill in weaving compelling tales of espionage about ordinary people, suddenly caught—by events they themselves do not trigger—in sticky situations of international consequence. It was a formula Hitchcock often used himself, for he returned to the spy story time and again.

In Hitchcock's adaptation of the Somerset Maugham Ashenden stories, however—the film called *Secret Agent* (1936)—the central character is not an innocent but a fully vested professional spy. Not only is he in the government's espionage service, "Ashenden" (even his name is under cover, assumed) is being sent by his superior to Switzerland to kill a man. Interestingly, the chief from whom he gets his orders is known only as R, presaging James Bond, a spy who also reported to a head officer whose name was an alphabet code. Hitchcock deftly cast the rising British theatrical player John Gielgud—thin, intense—as his hero, while deliberately choosing Robert Young, a much more dashing leading-man type, as villain.

Secret Agent aside, bewildered civilians were always the core of Hitch's other spy films. In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* the year before, Robert Donat was an ex-army officer pulled into a wild adventure when a mysterious woman spy took refuge in his rooms and, mur-

dered, whispered to him a dying secret. The "thirty-nine steps" was the name of a foreign spy ring. And the year before *that* film, in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, an English couple on a ski vacation in Switzerland witness a secret agent killed before their eyes. He, too, has a dying message: an assassination of world-shaking consequences is scheduled for London's Albert Hall. Only our couple can prevent it. The director so liked this plot he remade it in 1956.

In *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) the spy is a sweet, genteel English nanny, Miss Froy, who seems more at home dining on tea and scones than transporting crucial messages—coded in a tune she hums—across international borders. (Fritz Lang also used harmless-looking old ladies for diabolical missions.) She vanishes rather early, abducted by the enemy on a train, and it is two young people, fellow travellers, around whom the wheels actually spin. Surprisingly, when all three escape at the end, the enemy spy salutes them: "Jolly good luck to them!"

But then, even in Hitchcock's epic American espionage adventure, *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), chief German spy Herbert Marshall, who throughout the film schemes to kill reporter Joel McCrea, is allowed at the finale a redeeming moment of grace and a curtain explanation: "I fought for my country the only way I knew how . . ."

Sabotage (1936), from a Joseph Conrad novel, deals with a spy's wife; *Notorious* (1946) has Ingrid Bergman coerced by our government into marrying an enemy spy so she can gather information. *Saboteur* (1942) is a rich American variant to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, with Robert Cummings pursuing a vast spy network across America coast to coast. (He is another innocent bystander, wanted by the police.) Like *Foreign Correspondent*, it is often unfairly dismissed as a lesser work of the master.

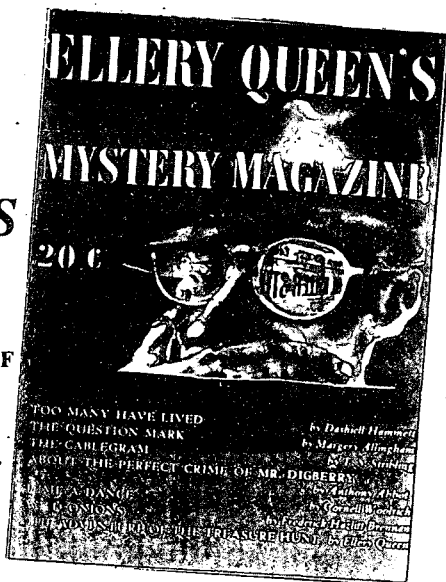
But the ultimate innocent pulled into an espionage vortex must be Cary Grant in *North by Northwest* (1959). An advertising executive drifting into New York's Plaza Hotel for a drink, he is mistaken for an actually *nonexistent* spy, an identity set up by American intelligence, and forced to become that non-person with enemy agents in violent pursuit!

Hitchcock was to tackle spy themes twice more, in *Torn Curtain* (1966) and *Topaz* (1969), but neither film was very successful. He spent the final year of his life, while seriously ill, preparing an espionage thriller set in part in Siberia, a project that was shelved at his death.

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FICTION

The Wall

by
Stephen Wasylyk

The music that was Julia was gone, stilled by a panicky bullet fired by a masked gunman during a holdup at a small bank where she had gone to cash a check, where she wouldn't have been on that day at that hour if it hadn't been their third anniversary. The gift she intended to buy remained unbought, the gunman instead bequeathing to Kern Masland an emptiness and knife-edged memories of the happiest thirty-six months he had ever known.

And Masland, a tall man with a body beginning to lose the leanness of a farm boyhood, wandered through the silent

house the day after the funeral, knowing he could live there no longer and could not go back to a job that held no meaning now.

He made one fifteen minute phone call to his attorney, giving him the power to sell everything, packed a bag, and locked the door of the house behind him as though he could imprison inside the past three years.

He threw his bag into the car in the driveway, not the sleek, shiny one that had been hers, but the dull, spotted-with-unmatched-paint, decade-old sedan that had faithfully carried him back and forth to work for years, the miles mounting

with trouble-free precision; one of those anomalies that a production line occasionally spews forth in which everything fits and meshes and works with a total harmony that seems to go on forever.

It had brought him to Philadelphia five years ago. Now it would take him back whence he had come, the small farm in a northern Pennsylvania county that he had inherited six months ago from his father and that was being worked by a man named Luther, who had taken care of his father during his last days.

It seemed to Masland that the farm represented everything he should never have left, that the vision of happiness that had brought him here had been ephemeral, a carrot held forth on a string that had always been destined to be snatched away.

Three hours later, late summer darkness had fallen as he drove along a straight stretch of undulating country road edged with low stone walls, the corn in the fields beyond them standing tall. The car coughed once and something within that had already passed its useful life years ago snapped with a screech of tortured metal. The car slowed and stopped of its own accord, leaving no doubt that the breakdown was terminal.

He couldn't fault the car for that. At least, when it expired, it had done so within two miles of his goal.

He switched on the emergency lights and left the car on the shoulder, the lamps blinking like the panting of a dying animal.

A fat slice of moon rode low in a jewelled sky, casting enough light to take the edge off the darkness. The warm night was calm as though deciding, now that the sun was gone, what it would do with itself during the long hours before it reappeared.

The darkness was familiar, filled with small night sounds. Masland remembered from his boyhood, and he felt no concern or apprehension. Only darkness that held unknown, unseen things could cause a man's palms to sweat and his breath to catch in his throat, so he walked unconcerned.

He had gone perhaps a quarter mile and was approaching a break in the stone wall where a lane led to a farmhouse perched on a hill.

Even in the dimness, the lawn before the house was beautiful; smooth and sweeping in a gentle rise to where the white frame dwelling sat like a gem on dark velvet that was broken only by the curving, white-gravelled ribbon that led to the front door.

Masland knew the house well. He had spent many hours there

and had helped to keep that lawn mowed and weeded and fertilized because it pleased Mrs. Asher, a strong, wiry woman with a determined chin and a gentle voice. Once her son had been his best friend.

One day she had shown them a photograph of a manor house owned by an English earl, the lawn smooth and precise and tailored. "If he can have it, so can I," she had said. "This is my mansion." The earl's lawn had probably been created and maintained by six gardeners. She had equalled it with the help of two small boys.

The farm abutted Masland's. After Mr. Asher had died, Masland's father had placed a standing offer to buy her out, an offer that was still in effect the day he died, and Masland had repeated it. Luther could work both farms with little more trouble than one, something he was doing now in the spirit of friendliness, but Mrs. Asher refused again, simply because she had nowhere else to go. "You can have it when I die," she had said.

Masland's head swivelled at the sound of a revved-up engine. Twin headlights pulled away from in front of the house, heading down the lane, moving fast.

The headlights grew brighter, blinding him momentarily. The vehicle, a dark van loom-

ing in the darkness, roared by and turned down the road on screeching tires, leaving Masland with the impression of two occupants, the driver's pale face staring at him, and a huge white flower and script lettering that seemed familiar painted on the truck's side.

The red taillights grew smaller and the roaring engine faded as the van headed down the road.

Masland resumed his walk.

Far ahead, the van slowed and slewed across the macadam, hesitated; then turned and sped back toward him.

He stood on the three foot wide gravel shoulder, watching it come roaring onward in the center of the deserted road.

A hundred yards. Seventy-five. Fifty.

The lights edged toward him. Masland stiffened.

Now the van was in the wrong lane, one set of wheels riding dirt, the lights blinding.

Masland stepped back another foot to where the shoulder became a shallow drainage ditch, cursing softly under his breath at the driver's warped sense of humor which made it a joke to scare the hell out of a pedestrian by roaring past, inches away, a version of the chicken game indulged in by beer-drinking teenagers.

The lights bore down.

Only when they were within

short feet did Masland realize with cold horror that this was no game and there would be no last minute swerve.

Desperately he hurled himself over the wall as those brutal tons of metal flashed by with a rattling, bloodchilling explosion of sound, leaving behind a debilitating fear and the sickening odor of exhaust fumes.

He hit, rolled, and came to his hands and knees, shaken and furious. The van slid to a stop with screaming brakes and screeching tires, skidding halfway across the road. The engine roared as the driver threw it into reverse, then jerked it into forward motion, the headlights sweeping until they found Masland and pinned him against the night.

Masland's skin crawled. It appeared as though the driver, not content with almost killing him, intended to try again.

He sprinted across the broad lawn toward the house on the hill and the safety of those yellow lights gleaming in the windows.

The van accelerated into the lane on squealing tires.

Masland ran harder.

The van veered, heading across the grass toward him, engine roaring.

Masland glanced back over his shoulder, not believing what he saw. It didn't seem possible

that the van would follow him across the lawn within open view of a possible witness in the house. Yet it had swung in behind him, gaining on his every step.

My God, he thought. Why?

Panic clutched at his throat with icy fingers. He was caught out in the open. The house was ahead, too far to reach. The bulwark of the wall behind him was cut off by the van. To his right at the edge of the lawn was a distant stand of trees, while to his left, the lawn stretched into darkness.

The van thundered after him. He ran as he had never run before, even though the night held no refuge.

The light from the headlights thrust his long shadow ahead, etching it sharply as the van bore down like a rogue elephant. The sound of the engine grew louder until it enveloped him and drowned out his labored breathing.

Masland's brain screamed with terror. His skin shrank in anticipation of those tons of metal smashing into his body.

Fear tore a whimper from his throat as he planted one foot and frantically dived to one side as the van thundered past.

Mouth dry and heart pounding, hands on knees and gasping for air, he watched the van already turning; an angry,

frustrated predator that had barely missed its prey, its rear wheels gouging furiously at the sod.

Masland fled, sprinting away from those sweeping lights, but they found him, angled to cut him off and drew a bead on him as the nightmare continued.

The familiar grass was spongy beneath his feet, the green brilliant in the harsh light. He had run across the lawn many times as a boy, but fear overrode those memories and he ran for his life, mind blank, aware only of the pursuing juggernaut intent on smashing him and leaving him broken and bleeding.

Again his brain screamed at him with senseless words of self-preservation, and again he threw himself aside as the van flashed by, inches away.

He picked himself up slowly, gulping at the night air with rasping breaths. Those two short sprints had clamped a band around his chest, his knees trembled and his legs felt too heavy to lift, but already the headlights were speeding toward him again, the van merciless and tireless.

To remain motionless was to die, and though life was a wobbling, hopeless run to nowhere, Masland ran.

Again that screaming sixth sense of self-preservation saved him, but each frantic dodge had

been a split second slower and this time the van brushed him, sending him tumbling. Sprawled in the grass, he was aware of a numbness in one arm and the salty taste of blood in his mouth. Spent, his muscles screaming in protest, he felt he couldn't run another step.

The van turned more slowly and paused, the engine idling, as though the driver also knew the deadly game was over and he could take his time.

Masland forced himself to his hands and knees, muscles quivering, his head hanging like that of an animal completely exhausted and accepting the inevitability of death.

Why?, he thought dully. He turned his head slowly and looked at the house, wondering why there was no movement there, no sudden blaze of the bright porch light as Mrs. Asher came running out to see what was going on, why she hadn't dashed inside to call the sheriff.

The van began to move, first gear whining.

Hell, let it come, he thought wearily. He had spent the last week wishing he was dead anyway. He had no idea why the driver of the van wanted to kill him, but dying was dying, and one way was as good as another.

He pushed himself to his feet and stood straight, his chest heaving, wishing only that he

knew what it was all about, but then his wife had died without knowing and understanding, either.

The lights bore down.

He glanced once more at the house on the hill as though he would find there the help he needed.

Where was Mrs. Asher?

Mrs. Asher—

Masland spun and ran, this time headed not toward the wall or the house but across the wide expanse of lawn stretching away in the darkness. Behind him, the pitch of the van's engine rose suddenly, the driver accelerating for the kill.

Masland's legs churned, his arms pumped in one last effort to avoid death. Like a runner forcing himself to finish a race, his head lolled back, his lungs burned, he wobbled from side to side.

Five yards, ten yards, twenty.

The van felt as though it was inches from his crawling flesh.

With one final effort, he half bent forward, staggered a few steps, and threw himself to one side at the edge of nothingness, the waters of a creek six feet below catching the starshine.

He heard the driver shout.

Brakes locked, wheels tearing furrows in the grass, the van catapulted into the dark emptiness of the night and nosed down, crashing into the creek

with the chilling, hollow boom of collapsing metal and the rattle of shattering glass, and as suddenly as it all began, there was only darkness and the hiss of hot metal immersed in water.

Masland raised his head. He could see nothing but the vague black bulk of the van on its side in the creek. He had no idea whether the two men inside were alive or dead or dying. He didn't care.

He lay beneath the jewelled sky, telling himself it was over now, his body refusing to believe him, his fingers digging into the security of the damp earth, and slowly the roaring of the blood in his ears and the pounding of his heart subsided and his fingers relaxed.

Once again, the night held only familiar, tranquil sounds.

After a time, he rose wearily and stumbled toward the house, knowing that the answer, if there was one, had to be there.

He mounted the steps and pushed open the door. The interior was in shambles. He went only as far as the doorway to the kitchen where the body of an elderly woman, in a flowered dress, lay in the center of the floor.

Masland picked up the phone with a still trembling hand and dialed the sheriff's office, dumbly wondering why a man who had started the day wishing he were

dead would fight so hard to stay alive.

In the burnished gray of a foggy dawn, the battered black van in the creek bed had no relationship to the roaring, twin-eyed monster that had tried to take Masland's life. The doors had sprung open, and the waters of the creek washed around a smashed television set, the gleam of assorted pieces of silver tableware dancing among the rocks on the bed.

Robbery and murder, said the sheriff, a slight man named Cromwell with a round, bald head and a face dried with age. The Asher house had been the fourth in three months, all cleaned out while their occupants were away—but Mrs. Asher, attending a church social and not feeling well, had returned home too soon.

She had walked in on them and recognized them and had to die because of it.

And Masland, walking along the road, had seen them leave.

Cromwell said, "They knew you would recognize the van—"

Masland nodded. "From the flower shop in town."

"Exactly. They needed transportation and one of them was the deliveryman and allowed to take the van home at night. Safe enough, when you think about it. On the road, you

wouldn't have glanced at it twice, but you saw it leaving the scene after they had killed her. When they pulled out, they probably didn't spot you walking along the dark road until it was too late, so they turned back to run you down."

They had hoped to do it with that one pass along the road, but when they had failed, they were committed, and had followed him onto the lawn. And they had died because Masland remembered in time.

He looked down at the rock wall over which the van had plunged. Rising gracefully from the creek bank to a height of more than six feet at its apex and then sloping smoothly down again, it had been carefully fitted and precisely shaped to divert the waters of the creek and keep them from undercutting the lawn. Twenty-five yards to one side or the other, the van would have simply run down a slight embankment to the water.

Cromwell saw the direction of his glance.

"Good thing you remembered this wall was here."

"I don't know how I could have ever forgotten," said Masland slowly. "She always complained that, the way the creek curved, each year the water eroded a bit more of her beloved lawn and something would have to be done about it, and her hus-

band was dead and the farm wasn't bringing in enough to pay someone to do it. Finally, she built it herself one summer, stone by stone. Came out here every spare moment she had and worked at it. I offered to help, but she said it was something she had to do alone. When it was done, she backfilled behind it and sowed seed. When I mowed the lawn for her afterward, I rode the tractor right along the edge, trying to see how close I could get, the way a kid will. I was lucky I never went over."

"Must have been a helluva job for a woman."

It was, thought Masland, but it had been the year her son had died and she had built the wall in silence, her face gaunt and drawn with unshed tears, methodically fitting the flat stones together.

Masland saw once again the slight figure struggling with the rocks under the hot summer sun, rocks that were too heavy, with sharp edges that cut through even the toughest gloves.

"You here for a visit or to stay?" asked Cromwell. "Be a lot better for everyone if some of you young fellas came back." He indicated the van. "Be a lot less of this. They like to pick on the elderly."

The creek swirled around the wreckage.

"Maybe we can make a deal," said Cromwell thoughtfully. "I could use a part-time deputy. A man who can handle himself the way you did last night can work for me anytime."

Masland turned and looked over the lawn, gouged and torn by the wheels of the van.

In time nature would restore it, but never to the way she loved it, smooth and sweeping.

That would require someone on hands and knees spending weeks fitting sod, reshaping and reseeded; brutal work for someone not accustomed to it, numbing the brain and stilling memories and bringing sleep from complete exhaustion.

Like building a stone wall against the past.

"I'll be here," he said. "There is something I have to do."

FICTION



The Last Payoff

by Cleo C.
Bresett, Jr.

Illustration by Arthur George

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I arrived at the Randell residence, on the northeast side of San Antonio, around seven o'clock. The house was a two story job too small to be classified a mansion but big enough to cost a fortune to maintain. I drove my six-year-old car up the circular driveway and parked it by a new Corvette and a year-old Cadillac. I shut off the engine and hoped the damn thing would start again.

It was a cool evening but I was sweating slightly as I walked slowly up the three steps to the front porch, which was supported by four square pillars. I took a deep breath and rang the doorbell. There hadn't been any clients in over a week, and I prayed my luck was about to change.

"May I help you?" a deep male voice said from behind the closed door.

"I hope so," I said loudly; trying not to sound eager. "My name's Zane Garrett. I have an appointment with Mr. Joseph Randell."

"Show me your license."

I took the photostat proving that I was a licensed private detective for the state of Texas out of my wallet and held it under my chin. The door opened slightly, but a thick chain lock was still fastened. Half of a man's profile went to my face and license quickly.

"Just a minute," the man said and closed the door. I heard the chain rattle and then the door opened just enough to let me into the house. The man locked the door with the chain and a dead-bolt lock. I put the photostat back in my wallet.

The man held out his hand and said, "I'm Joseph Randell, Mr. Garrett. So good of you to come at this late hour."

I shook Randell's hand. His grip was firm, but he looked like hell. He was four inches taller than I was, had broad shoulders, a receding hairline, and a square jaw. His blue eyes were bloodshot and tired.

"How can I help you, Mr. Randell?"

"Please come into the library. My wife is there, and we'll be more comfortable," Randell said.

I followed him down the hall. It was wide enough to drive a tank through. I glanced up the steep staircase that led to the second floor but didn't see anyone.

The library was large with bookcases lining the left and right walls. Against the far wall was a fireplace with a portrait of a woman hanging above it. The woman herself was sitting on the sofa.

"Norma, this is Mr. Garrett," Randell said. "Mr. Garrett, my wife Norma."

The artist who had painted

the portrait should see his model now, I thought. Norma Randell was a slim, hawk-faced woman in her middle thirties with small breasts and wide hips. Her green eyes were puffed, and her makeup was tear-stained. Her shoulder-length auburn hair was a mess.

"Mrs. Randell," I said, shaking her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Garrett. Are you going to help us?"

"I hope so. What's the problem?"

"Didn't Joseph tell you?"

"No, he didn't."

"I decided to wait until we joined you, Norma," Randell said. "I didn't want to forget anything. Would you care for a drink, Mr. Garrett?"

"No, thank you. I never touch the stuff," I said.

"Oh, you don't?" Randell said, surprised. "Please sit down," he added, pointing at a leather chair across from his wife. He mixed drinks for himself and his wife at a sideboard. When he finished, he sat down on the sofa beside his wife and held her left hand.

"I don't know where to begin," he said. "It's hard to believe it happened. I still can't believe it."

"Believe what, Mr. Randell?"

Mrs. Randell answered my question. She said matter-of-factly, "Our daughter Ruth has

been kidnapped."

"Kidnapped!" I said, louder than I intended.

"Yes, kidnapped," Randell said.

He spoke fast, as if the words burned his mouth. "When I finished work tonight and got into my car, a note was on the steering wheel. The note said to turn on the tape deck in the car and listen carefully to the cassette. Would you care to hear it, Mr. Garrett?"

"Yes," I said. "But first, have you called the police?"

"No."

"I suggest you do, Mr. Randell. I'm only a one man operation. The police can do a hell of a lot more than I can."

"No police," Mrs. Randell said sharply. "To tell you the truth, Mr. Garrett, I didn't want even you involved in this, but Joseph overruled me."

Randell patted his wife's hand and told me, "Your former father-in-law, Arthur Harrison, and I are old friends. I called him and asked his advice. He said if one of his two daughters were kidnapped, he'd call you. He said you were very good."

"Why don't you want to call the police?" I asked Mrs. Randell.

"I don't think they can help us. I don't think you can either, Mr. Garrett."

"I can try, Mrs. Randell. You need somebody. May I hear the tape?"

"Certainly," Randell said. He let go of his wife's hand and walked over to an elaborate stereo system. He came back to the sofa carrying a portable cassette player. Mrs. Randell finished her drink and went to make another one.

"Are you sure you won't have one, Mr. Garrett?" she asked.

"No. Thank you."

"Joseph?"

"No," Randell said sharply. He was going to say more, but he caught me looking at him. I shifted my gaze to Mrs. Randell and watched her make a double scotch and soda.

Randell put the cassette player on a glass coffee table and looked at me. I nodded, and he pressed the play button.

The male voice on the tape was wheezing as though the man had asthma. The message was short and to the point. "Norma, I have your, ha ha, daughter. If you want her back it will cost you two hundred grand in old fifties and hundred dollar bills. Get the money and don't call the cops. I'll call you tonight at eight. You can talk to your kid then. Remember, get the dough and no cops. If you don't follow my orders, your daughter is dead meat."

"Damn him," Mrs. Randell

said with naked hatred. She took a large swallow of her drink and started to cough.

When she had control of herself, I asked, "Why did he laugh when he mentioned your daughter, Mrs. Randell?"

"Ruth is my daughter," Mrs. Randell said. "I was a widow, and Ruth was almost two when I married Joseph. Ruth's ten now, almost eleven."

She hadn't answered my question. I let it pass and asked, "What do you want me to do, Mr. Randell?"

He glanced at his watch before he answered me. "The kidnapper should call shortly. When he does, I want you to come with me while I pay the ransom."

"Most kidnappers want the victim to come alone. If I go with you, it could endanger your daughter's life."

"That's what I told him, but he wouldn't listen to me," Mrs. Randell said angrily. She finished her drink in long gulps and went to the sideboard to mix another one.

"Norma, I'm doing what I think is right," Randell said. "Don't you think you've had enough to drink? We'll need clear heads before this night's over."

Mrs. Randell had poured the scotch in her glass. She drank it neat, shuddered, and then

said, "I pray you did the right thing calling Mr. Garrett."

"I think I did," Randell said, then told me, "I'm sorry, Mr. Garrett. We don't mean to put you in the middle."

"Don't worry about it. I understand. May I ask you some questions?"

"Sure, but first I think we should discuss your fee."

"We can talk about that later, Mr. Randell. Where was your daughter snatched?"

"From here," Mrs. Randell said. "Joseph was at his office and I was at the beauty salon. I've left Ruth alone many times before this. She was warned about opening the door to strangers. She was practicing the piano when I left. I know I locked the door behind me. I know I did." Mrs. Randell started to cry and Randell put his arm around her and pulled her close. He patted his wife's back and kissed her neck.

"What about servants? Do you have any?"

"We have a maid three times a week. Today wasn't one of them," Randell said.

"Do you have the ransom here?"

"Yes. It's my wife's money, actually. I have a good investment firm, but couldn't get that much cash together. Norma's first husband left her a great deal of money."

"Do you always drive the same car, Mr. Randell?"

Mrs. Randell pulled away from her husband's arms and wiped her eyes. "What in hell kind of question is that?"

"I hope it's a good one, Mrs. Randell. The man on the tape addressed you by your first name. He probably wanted to talk to you, not your husband."

"Ah, I see," Mrs. Randell said. She blew her nose before she continued. "Joseph drove my car, the Cadillac, today. It was due for a checkup. Do you really think the kidnapper wanted me to hear the tape first?"

"It looks that way. Maybe he knew you had the money. But I . . ."

The ringing of the telephone made me jump. Mrs. Randell put her closed fist to her mouth. Randell sighed and walked to the phone.

The conversation that followed was brief. In it, Randell insisted the caller talk to him and not his wife. He also demanded to talk to his daughter. Throughout the whole thing, he gripped the phone so tightly his knuckles were salt-white.

When he hung up the phone, he glanced quickly at his watch, and said, "Ruth's all right. She wasn't even crying. We don't have much time. Do you have a gun, Mr. Garrett?"

"No. It's against the law for

a private detective to carry a pistol in the state of Texas."

"I didn't know that." Randell turned to his wife. "Norma, please come with us to the den." He left the room and I followed the two of them down the hall. Mrs. Randell held onto her husband for support. I could see her shaking.

The den was on the left side of the house, next to the music room. I saw a baby grand piano as we passed it. Randell had a large gun cabinet unlocked when I entered the den. He handed his wife an automatic shotgun.

"It's loaded. Just click the safety off and pull the trigger. Would you like a pistol, Mr. Garrett?"

"Yeah. A .357 magnum, if you have one," I said, hoping I wouldn't need it. I stuck the pistol in my belt under my suit jacket.

Randell dropped a pistol in his pocket, kissed his wife, and picked up a briefcase, which I assumed contained the money. "We should be back in less than an hour. Lock the door behind us and don't open it for anyone. If anyone tries to get in, shoot them."

"Joseph, please tell me where you're going."

"There's no time, Norma. We'll be back shortly and Ruth will be with us."

Mrs. Randell locked the door behind us. I grabbed Randell's arm. He was heading for the Corvette.

"We'd better take your wife's car. The kidnapper will be looking for the Caddy."

Randell nodded and unlocked the Cadillac. I got in the back seat and lay on the floor. The tires screeched as we moved forward. I removed the pistol from my belt and held it tightly in my right hand. The dust from the carpet made me sneeze. Better now than later, I thought. I breathed through my mouth and asked, "How much time do we have?"

"Less than fifteen minutes," Randell said. "The man told me to drive down Thousand Oaks Road until I come to a side road that will be marked with Ruth's pink hair ribbon hanging on a tree limb. I'm to drive a mile, turn off the lights and engine, and walk down the road until he tells me to stop."

"I'm not going to be much use to you. There's no way I can get out of the car without anyone's seeing me," I said, rising up to where I could see out the windshield.

"I know. He has a good plan," Randell said, paused, and then asked me, "Will you do something for me, Mr. Garrett?"

"Name it."

"If you hear shooting, come

running. There may be a chance Ruth will still be alive."

"Okay, but take my advice. Don't try to be a hero. Get your daughter back and clear out."

"Don't worry, I'm no hero. I just want Ruth safe."

We didn't say anything until we came to the side road marked by a long strip of pink hair ribbon. Randell drove for a few minutes. The road was unpaved and bumpy. I lay back down on the floor and braced myself with my elbows, trying to steady myself. When he stopped the car and shut off the lights and engine, I whispered, "Leave the keys in the ignition. Good luck to you."

"Thanks." Randell opened the door. The interior light made me realize how a cockroach feels when he is caught in the kitchen. I started to sweat. The light went out as Randell slammed the door behind him.

I counted slowly to a hundred. Then I climbed over into the front seat. If there was anything to see, I couldn't see it. The minutes crawled by as if they were hours. I wanted a cigarette badly, but didn't dare light one.

Someone was coming. My mind sensed it before my ears heard footsteps. I peeked over the dashboard and saw Randell walking toward the car. He was carrying his daughter. I had the

engine started as he set his daughter on the seat between us. I put the pistol back in my belt.

Ruth Randell's hands and ankles were bound with one inch surgical tape. Fragments of adhesive clung to the corners of her small cupid's mouth. She was pretty, with short curly blond hair, blue eyes, and dimples. I smiled at her. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. Thank you, sir." Ruth answered me with a grin.

Randell closed the passenger door and gently removed the tape from Ruth's hands and ankles. I turned the Caddy around and drove back to Thousand Oaks Road. Randell was crying silently with relief. He held Ruth in his lap.

"Don't cry, Daddy. I'm okay. Please don't cry," Ruth said, sounding more mature than her years.

Randell blew his nose and wiped his eyes. He held Ruth close until we got back to the house. He had the car door opened before I shut the engine off. Carrying Ruth in his arms, he walked quickly to the front door. I followed, more slowly. Mrs. Randell came out on the porch and took Ruth from her husband's arms. They went inside the house holding each other tightly. I locked the door behind me.

"Will you join me in a drink, Mr. Garrett?" Randell asked, steering me toward the library.

"Yes. A soft one, please."

"Ah, yes. I forgot you don't drink," Randell said, watching his wife and daughter mount the stairs. Mrs. Randell still carried the shotgun in her right hand.

We entered the library and Randell made himself a bourbon and Seven. He gave me a glass of Seven-Up. We toasted each other silently and drank deeply.

"I suggest you call the cops now, Mr. Randell," I said, putting my empty glass on the table beside me.

"Not now. In the morning. Norma's too upset to talk, and I want Ruth to get a good night's sleep. Let me write you a check before you go, Mr. Garrett." Randell put his own glass down beside his wife's.

"I wish you'd call the police."

"I'm sorry, I won't do it tonight. I'll get your check."

"It can wait until morning. I'll have to be here when you talk to the cops. What time do you plan on calling them?"

"Oh, about nine. Yes, let's say nine o'clock."

"I'll see you at nine, then. Good night," I said, then remembered the pistol and car keys. I handed them to Randell.

He took them and we went to

the front door. "Thank you, Mr. Garrett. Good night." The door closed and I heard the chain rattle as he locked the door.

After numerous attempts and a few choice words, I got my heap started and drove back to my office-apartment on North St. Mary's Street, across from the Greyhound bus station.

My office was dusty and I sneezed when I opened the door. I locked the door behind me and went from the small front room I use as a reception area to the back room that is my office. I opened the connecting door to the next apartment and was home.

Sleep didn't come for a long time. I tossed and turned and thought about the Randells. I should have made Randell call the cops, I told myself numerous times.

It was a little after eight the next morning when the phone rang. I was showered, shaved, dressed, and drinking a cup of black coffee.

"Garrett Investigations. Zane Garrett speaking."

"Garrett, this is Sergeant Owen Kincaid of the San Antonio police department. Do you remember me?"

"Sure. We worked together a couple of times when I was still on the force. How've you been?"

"I've been better. How soon

can you get out to the Randell place?" Sergeant Kincaid asked. I noticed he didn't ask me if I knew where the Randell place was.

"About thirty minutes. Why? What's going on?"

"Joseph Randell's dead. Somebody rigged a bomb to the ignition of his car. He never knew what hit him. I'll be expecting you."

I hung up the phone. "Damn," I said aloud, grabbed my jacket, and left the office.

The early morning traffic was heavy, and it took me forty minutes to get to the Randell house. I gave my name to the officer at the front of the driveway, and he waved me by. Three police cars and a single firetruck were parked around what used to be the white Cadillac. Now it was a smoke-blackened ruin. A mobile evidence unit was also on the scene. Its rear doors were opened, and men walked to and from it carrying pieces of the wreckage.

Sergeant Kincaid saw me and signaled me to come to him. He was dressed in black cowboy boots, a western-cut suit, a string-tie, and a Stetson. He had put on a few pounds since I had last seen him. He was short and stocky, with a bulge developing around the waist area.

I shook his outstretched hand. "I'm a little late."

"Don't worry about it." Sergeant Kincaid's voice was surprisingly soft for a cop. He led me away from the Caddy and we went up the porch steps and into the house. "I understand you went with Randell last night to pay off the kidnapper."

"Yeah. Mrs. Randell told you, I guess."

"She told me after I pushed her a little."

"How's she taking Randell's death?"

"As well as can be expected. She says she doesn't know what's going on, and answered all our questions. She's a tough dame. Her doctor was here. He gave her a shot. She's resting upstairs. She wouldn't get in bed until we let her keep a shotgun with her. Like I said, she's a tough dame. I don't think she'd hesitate to use it."

"Where's her daughter?"

"She's at her aunt's house. Randell's sister," Sergeant Kincaid said. He pushed his hat back on his head. "You going to tell me what happened last night?"

"Why not?" I said and told him, amazed at how little time it took to tell.

"You made some dumb moves," Sergeant Kincaid said when I finished. "We could've had an evidence unit at the pay-

off site and maybe prevented Randell's death."

"You're right," I said, because he was right. "I didn't want to wait, but my client had his daughter back and was happy. The time for calling the law into his affairs was his decision."

"Yeah. Well, he's dead now and his affairs are public property. Where's this tape? I want to listen to it."

"It should be in the library."

The cassette player was still on the coffee table. I rewound the tape and pressed the play button. We listened to it three times.

"Something's not right," Sergeant Kincaid said when I shut the machine off.

"I know. Since when do kidnappers call a victim by her Christian name? I was questioning Mrs. Randell about it last night when the kidnapper called."

"You got any ideas about this case, Garrett?"

"A few. I do have a suggestion. These two glasses on the sideboard should have a good set of the Randells' prints. It might pay to have them checked out."

"Why?" Sergeant Kincaid asked. "You think Mrs. Randell had something to do with her husband's death or kidnapping her own daughter?"

"I don't know what in hell's going on," I said truthfully. "But everything points to Mrs. Randell. The ransom tape was left in the Caddy. The Caddy belongs to Mrs. Randell, and the kidnapper called her by her first name. This morning the Caddy blows up. Did the bomb squad go over the Corvette?"

"Yeah. It was clean. As clean as the Randells appear to be. I've already checked our files and the state cops for priors. Not even a traffic violation." He took off his hat, dried the sweatband with his handkerchief, and put it back on his head. "You sure last night was the first time you met the Randells?"

"Hell, yes," I said angrily, then remembered something. "You better talk to my ex-father-in-law, Arthur Harrison. Joseph Randell said he called him and he recommended me."

"I'll do that. In the meantime, you stick around. I may want to ask you some more questions. I'm going to get a lab man to lift these prints."

I followed Kincaid out and went upstairs to see how Mrs. Randell was doing. The stairs were steeper than they looked, and I climbed them slowly. I found Mrs. Randell in the bedroom on my left. She was fully dressed in a white blouse and black slacks but was lying on

the kingsize bed with a thin coverlet over her legs. She had combed her hair and the Auburn shone. Her makeup was streaked, and her eyes were wet.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," I said, standing at the foot of the bed. The shotgun her husband had given her last night was propped against the headboard.

"You're not. I'm glad you came, Mr. Garrett. I've refused police protection, and my maid was hysterical after the explosion and has gone home. I want you to stay here with me." Her words were slurred, and she was having trouble keeping her eyes open.

"Sure. I'll be glad to. But I think you should ask for the police instead."

"I don't want any police here. I'll pay you well if you stay."

I shrugged. "You better rest now, Mrs. Randell," I told her gently.

"My doctor gave me a shot. I've been fighting it."

"Don't fight it. Get some sleep. I'll be here when you wake up," I told her. "I'm going downstairs, but I'll look in on you from time to time. If you need anything, just let me know."

I went downstairs to look for Sergeant Kincaid. He came out of the library and we walked outside and stood on the porch.

"We lifted two good sets of prints off the glasses, and I'm going to put a priority on them with the FBI. How's Mrs. Randell?"

"She's sleeping."

"Good. We're all done here. You staying?"

"Yeah. Mrs. Randell asked me to."

"You got a piece?"

"No. I'll borrow one from Randell's gun cabinet."

"I'll be in touch."

I stood on the porch until the last police car was out of sight. I locked the door and started around the windows on the left side of the house. I secured the music room and entered the den. The whole damn world turned a brilliant red.

What in hell was I doing on my hands and knees, I wondered. My head was hurting so bad I thought it would explode. I felt another dull sensation of pain in my head. My eyes cleared for a brief moment and I saw the yellow carpet. My elbows were quivering and I relaxed and fell forward into a quiet, peaceful, colorless world.

When I came to, I was staring at a fuzzy yellow thing speckled with red. It took me a few seconds to see that the fuzzy thing was the yellow rug and the red was my blood. I

tried to touch my head. My hands were taped behind me; one crossed over the other. My ankles were taped, too. A broad strip of tape covered my mouth. I could taste the glue. I wiggled over to the large desk in the middle of the room, ignoring as best I could the pain in my head. Mrs. Randell's life might depend on how fast I moved. Unless I was already too late.

Bracing myself against the desk, I got to my feet and looked at the desktop. A large pair of scissors was lying on the far corner of the desk. I leaned over and almost passed out from the pain. Moving the scissors with my jaw, I got them to the right-hand corner of the desk. Then I turned around and, after some doing, got the right top drawer of the desk opened. I opened the scissors into an X. Then I jammed them between the desktop and the drawer. I held the drawer closed with my butt. The scissors had sharp points and I sliced my wrists numerous times before I cut through the tape. I felt my head. The blood was dry. I had stopped bleeding.

The pain almost made me pass out when I peeled the tape strip from my mouth. Pieces of skin and blood clung to the tape. I wiped my bloody lips with my tongue and bent to undo my ankles. Bad mistake.

The blackness was coming at me again. I lowered myself to the floor slowly and took deep breaths. Somehow I stayed conscious enough to get the tape off my ankles.

I used the scissors to pry the hasp off the gun cabinet, breaking them while doing so. The .38 special I chose was loaded. Feeling a little stronger than a noodle in boiling water, I made it to the phone. It was dead. The wires were ripped from the outlet. I headed down the hall, letting the wall hold me up. I reached the stairs and fought to stay conscious. I took more deep breaths and started to crawl up the stairs.

When I was a quarter of the way up, I wanted to stop and rest, but I heard mumbled voices from Mrs. Randell's bedroom and I kept crawling until I could hear them clearly. That put me about halfway up the stairs. I held the pistol in my right hand and listened.

"You look good and scared, Norma, baby," a man said. It was the same asthmatic voice I had heard on the tape. "You stay still, damn it, or I'll put a slug in you."

"If you're going to kill me, Sam, get on with it," Mrs. Randell said coolly.

"Oh, I'm going kill you, you can bet on it. But I'm going to take my time. I'm good at wait-

ing. I've waited almost ten years for this, and I'm not in any hurry at all."

"Where's Mr. Garrett? What did you do to him?"

"He's out cold in the den. Everyone's going to be warm soon, though. I'm putting the torch to this joint before I leave. I'm sorry the kid isn't here, I wanted a clean sweep. I should have slit her throat last night when I had the chance."

"You're sick, Sam. You enjoy killing."

"Almost as much as you do. But this is the last payoff. I'm going to plug you in the stomach and leave you like you did me. Don't worry about the pain, it won't take long for the flames to reach you. The fire will keep you toasty, too. The night you gut-shot me, nine years ago, it was cold, baby. Freezing cold."

The deep breathing was helping me and I crawled up a few more steps.

Sam was saying, "I never did figure out why you took the baby with you. You murdered her old man when he came with the ransom, then you shot me and left me for dead. You had the money, why in hell take the kid?"

"Because I couldn't kill her, that's why," Mrs. Randell answered. "We eventually settled here in San Antonio. I invested the money and tripled it in less

than five years."

I held onto the railing and got to my feet. The stairs started to spin. I closed my eyes and the dizziness passed. My legs felt leaden as I climbed a few more steps, and I had to lean on the bannister to catch my breath.

"How in hell did you find me?" Mrs. Randell asked.

"Your maid told me."

"My maid?"

"Yeah. Her sister's married to an air force guy stationed here. This guy's family lives next door to my brother in New Jersey. He came home on leave and I saw a picture of you and the maid. You looked very motherly holding the kid. I didn't figure it was the same brat we snatched nine years ago. Now that's funny as hell. Two payoffs for the same kid."

"I wish I'd killed you, Sam. I truly wish I had killed you."

Sam laughed loudly again. "I bet you do. You came damn close, Norma, baby. I don't know how in hell I got out of the woods and back to my brother's house. But I did. And now I'm here."

"Why did you kill my husband? He knew nothing about my past."

"The car bomb was meant for you, baby. Or for all of you with one blast. It was bad luck he started the car alone."

"He was putting the car in

the garage, that's all." Mrs. Randell started to cry.

"Cut it out, Norma, and stand up. It's your turn now."

I yelled. "Hey, Sam!"

Sam came out of the door firing a pistol. Two slugs breezed by my right ear. I pulled the trigger and hit him below the left shoulder. He spun around to face the doorway of Mrs. Randell's bedroom.

A thunderous boom came from inside the room. Sam took the full shotgun blast in his chest. It threw him back and he went over the railing. I watched him hit the floor below. His chest was a pool of blood. No more payoffs for Sam.

"Mr. Garrett, are you all right?" Mrs. Randell called softly. "Please answer me, Mr. Garrett."

The world was going around, and I fought to stay conscious. I cocked the pistol and, using the wall to steady myself, crept towards the bedroom doorway.

"Mr. Garrett," Mrs. Randell called again. "If you can hear me, please say something."

I held my breath, praying she'd come out of the bedroom without the shotgun.

"Damn you, answer me," Mrs. Randell screamed, and walked out. She had the shotgun in her

hands and she brought it up when she saw me.

I grabbed the barrel with my left hand and pushed it towards the ceiling as Mrs. Randell pulled the trigger. Pieces of plaster fell on us. She fired again and kneed me in the groin.

I dropped my pistol and grabbed the gun's stock with my right hand. I jerked the stock towards me quickly. For a split second the barrel was in line with Mrs. Randell's face. The gun roared again. Mrs. Randell fell beside me with her face gone.

I painfully got to my feet and went into the bedroom. The phone on the nightstand worked, and I called police headquarters.

The desk captain said he'd contact Sergeant Kincaid right away. I hung up the phone and slowly walked out of the bedroom and down the stairs. I unlocked the front door and sat on the porch steps. The fresh air cleared my head enough to remember Ruth. It wasn't going to be easy to tell her what had happened nine years ago, or what had taken place here today.

It wasn't going to be easy at all.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

Ashenden: The Traitor

by W. Somerset Maugham



It was not till the beginning of September that Ashenden, a writer by profession, who had been abroad at the outbreak of the war, managed to get back to England. He chanced soon after his arrival to go to a party and was there introduced to a middle-aged colonel whose name he did not catch. He had some talk with him. As he was about to leave, this officer came up to him and asked:

"I say, I wonder if you'd mind coming to see me. I'd rather like to have a chat with you."

"Certainly," said Ashenden. "Whenever you like."

"What about tomorrow at eleven?"

"All right."

"I'll just write down my address. Have you a card on you?"

Ashenden gave him one and on this the colonel scribbled in pencil the name of a street and the number of a house. When Ashenden walked along next morning to keep his appointment he found himself in a street of rather vulgar red brick houses in a part of London that had once been fashionable, but was now fallen in the esteem of the house-hunter who wanted a good address. On the house at which Ashenden had been asked to call there was a board up to announce that it was for sale, the shutters were closed, and there was no sign that anyone lived in it. He rang the bell and the door was opened by a noncommissioned officer so promptly that he was startled. He was not asked his business, but led immediately into a long room at the back, once evidently a dining room, the florid decoration of which looked oddly out of keeping with the office furniture, shabby and sparse, that was in it. It gave Ashenden the impression of a room in which the brokers had taken possession. The colonel, who was known in the Intelligence Department, as Ashenden later discovered, by the letter R., rose when he came in and shook hands with him. He was a man somewhat above the middle height, lean, with a yellow, deeply-lined face, thin grey hair, and a toothbrush mustache. The thing immediately noticeable about him was the closeness with which his blue eyes were set. He only just escaped a squint. They were hard and cruel eyes, and very wary; and they gave him a cunning, shifty look. Here was a man that you could neither like nor trust at first sight. His manner was pleasant and cordial.

He asked Ashenden a good many questions and then, without further to-do, suggested that he had particular qualifications for the secret service. Ashenden was acquainted with several Euro-

pean languages and his profession was excellent cover; on the pretext that he was writing a book he could without attracting attention visit any neutral country. It was while they were discussing this point that R. said:

"You know, you ought to get material that would be very useful to you in your work."

"I shouldn't mind that," said Ashenden.

"I'll tell you an incident that occurred only the other day and I can vouch for its truth. I thought at the time it would make a damned good story. One of the French ministers went down to Nice to recover from a cold and he had some very important documents with him that he kept in a dispatch case. They were very important indeed. Well, a day or two after he arrived he picked up a yellow-haired lady at some restaurant or other where there was dancing, and he got very friendly with her. To cut a long story short he took her back to his hotel—of course it was a very imprudent thing to do—and when he came to himself in the morning the lady and the dispatch case had disappeared. They had one or two drinks up in his room and his theory is that when his back was turned the woman slipped a drug into his glass."

R. finished and looked at Ashenden with a gleam in his close-set eyes.

"Dramatic, isn't it?" he asked.

"Do you mean to say that happened the other day?"

"The week before last."

"Impossible," cried Ashenden. "Why, we've been putting that incident on the stage for sixty years, we've written it in a thousand novels. Do you mean to say that life has only just caught up with us?"

R. was a trifle disconcerted.

"Well, if necessary, I could give you names and dates, and believe me, the Allies have been put to no end of trouble by the loss of the documents that the dispatch case contained."

"Well, sir, if you can't do better than that in the secret service," sighed Ashenden, "I'm afraid that as a source of inspiration to the writer of fiction, it's a washout. We really *can't* write that story much longer."

It did not take them long to settle things and when Ashenden rose to go he had already made careful note of his instructions. He was to start for Geneva next day. The last words that R. said to him, with a casualness that made them impressive, were:

"There's just one thing I think you ought to know before you take on this job. And don't forget it. If you do well you'll get no thanks and if you get into trouble you'll get no help. Does that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"Then I'll wish you good afternoon."

Having taken a room at the hotel at which he had been instructed to stay Ashenden went out; it was a lovely day, early in August, and the sun shone in an unclouded sky. He had not been to Lucerne since he was a boy and but vaguely remembered a covered bridge, a great stone lion, and a church in which he had sat, bored yet impressed, while they played an organ; and now wandering along a shady quay (and the lake looked just as tawdry and unreal as it looked on the picture post-cards) he tried not so much to find his way about a half-forgotten scene as to reform in his mind some recollection of the shy and eager lad, so impatient for life (which he saw not in the present of his adolescence but only in the future of his manhood) who so long ago had wandered there. But it seemed to him that the most vivid of his memories was not of himself, but of the crowd; he seemed to remember sun and heat and people; the train was crowded and so was the hotel, the lake steamers were packed and on the quays and in the streets you threaded your way among the throng of holiday makers. They were fat and old and ugly and odd, and they stank. Now, in wartime, Lucerne was as deserted as it must have been before the world at large discovered that Switzerland was the playground of Europe. Most of the hotels were closed, the streets were empty, the rowing boats for hire rocked idly at the water's edge and there was none to take them, and in the avenues by the lake the only persons to be seen were serious Swiss taking their neutrality, like a dachshund, for a walk with them. Ashenden felt exhilarated by the solitude, and sitting down on a bench that faced the water surrendered himself deliberately to the sensation. It was true that the lake was absurd, the water was too blue, the mountains too snowy, and its beauty, hitting you in the face, exasperated rather than thrilled; but all the same there was something pleasing in the prospect, an artless candor, like one of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, that made Ashenden smile with complacency. Lucerne reminded him of wax flowers under glass cases and cuckoo clocks and fancy work in Berlin wool. So

long at all events as the fine weather lasted he was prepared to enjoy himself. He did not see why he should not at least try to combine pleasure to himself with profit to his country. He was travelling with a brand-new passport in his pocket, under a borrowed name, and this gave him an agreeable sense of owning a new personality. He was often slightly tired of himself and it diverted him for a while to be merely a creature of R.'s facile invention.

Ashenden got up and strolled slowly to his hotel. It was a small German hotel, of the second class, spotlessly clean, and his bedroom had a nice view; it was furnished with brightly varnished pitch-pine, and though on a cold wet day it would have been wretched, in that warm and sunny weather it was gay and pleasing. There were tables in the hall and he sat down at one of these and ordered a bottle of beer. The landlady was curious to know why in that dead season he had come to stay and he was glad to satisfy her curiosity. He told her that he had recently recovered from an attack of typhoid and had come to Lucerne to get back his strength. He was employed in the Censorship Department and was taking the opportunity to brush up his rusty German. He asked her if she could recommend to him a German teacher. The landlady was a blond and blowsy Swiss, good-humored and talkative, so that Ashenden felt pretty sure that she would repeat in the proper quarter the information he gave her. It was his turn now to ask a few questions. She was voluble on the subject of the war on account of which the hotel, in that month so full that rooms had to be found for visitors in neighboring houses, was nearly empty. A few people came in from outside to eat their meals *en pension*, but she had only two lots of resident guests. One was an old Irish couple who lived in Vevey and passed their summers in Lucerne and the other was an Englishman and his wife. She was a German and they were obliged on that account to live in a neutral country. Ashenden took care to show little curiosity about them—he recognized in the description Grantley Caypor—but of her own accord she told him that they spent most of the day walking about the mountains. Herr Caypor was a botanist and much interested in the flora of the country. His lady was a very nice woman and she felt her position keenly. Ah, well, the war could not last forever. The landlady bustled away and Ashenden went upstairs.

Dinner was at seven, and, wishing to be in the dining room before anyone else so that he could take stock of his fellow guests as they

entered, he went down as soon as he heard the bell. It was a very plain, stiff whitewashed room, with chairs of the same shiny pitch-pine as in his bedroom, and on the walls were oleographs of Swiss lakes. On each little table was a bunch of flowers. It was all neat and clean and presaged a bad dinner. Ashenden would have liked to make up for it by ordering a bottle of the best Rhine wine to be found in the hotel, but did not venture to draw attention to himself by extravagance (he saw on two or three tables half-empty bottles of table hock, which made him surmise that his fellow guests drank thriftily, and so contented himself with ordering a pint of lager). Presently one or two persons came in, single men with some occupation in Lucerne and obviously Swiss, and sat down each at his own little table and untied the napkins that at the end of luncheon they had neatly tied up. They propped newspapers against their water jugs and read while they somewhat noisily ate their soup. Then entered a very old tall bent man, with white hair and a drooping white mustache, accompanied by a little old white-haired lady in black. These were certainly the Irish colonel and his wife of whom the landlady had spoken. They took their seats and the colonel poured out a thimbleful of wine for his wife and a thimbleful for himself. They waited in silence for their dinner to be served to them by the buxom, hearty maid.

At last the persons arrived for whom Ashenden had been waiting. He was doing his best to read a German book and it was only by an exercise of self-control that he allowed himself only for one instant to raise his eyes as they came in. His glance showed him a man of about forty-five with short dark hair, somewhat grizzled, of the middle height, but corpulent, with a broad red clean-shaven face. He wore a shirt open at the neck, with a wide collar, and a grey suit. He walked ahead of his wife, and of her Ashenden only caught the impression of a German woman self-effaced and dusty. Grantley Caypor sat down and began in a loud voice explaining to the waitress that they had taken an immense walk. They had been up some mountain the name of which meant nothing to Ashenden but which excited in the maid expressions of astonishment and enthusiasm. Then Caypor, still in fluent German but with a marked English accent, said that they were so late they had not even gone up to wash, but had just rinsed their hands outside. He had a resonant voice and a jovial manner.

"Serve me quick, we're starving with hunger, and bring beer, bring three bottles. *Lieber Gott*, what a thirst I have!"

He seemed to be a man of exuberant vitality. He brought into that dull, overclean dining room the breath of life and everyone in it appeared on a sudden more alert. He began to talk to his wife, in English, and everything he said could be heard by all; but presently she interrupted him with a remark made in an undertone. Caypor stopped and Ashenden felt that his eyes were turned in his direction. Mrs. Caypor had noticed the arrival of a stranger and had drawn her husband's attention to it. Ashenden turned the page of the book he was pretending to read, but he felt that Caypor's gaze was fixed intently upon him. When he addressed his wife again it was in so low a tone that Ashenden could not even tell what language he used, but when the maid brought them their soup Caypor, his voice still low, asked her a question. It was plain that he was enquiring who Ashenden was. Ashenden could catch of the maid's reply but the one word *länder*.

One or two people finished their dinner and went out picking their teeth. The old Irish colonel and his old wife rose from their table and he stood aside to let her pass. They had eaten their meal without exchanging a word. She walked slowly to the door; but the colonel stopped to say a word to a Swiss who might have been a local attorney, and when she reached it she stood there, bowed and with a sheep-like look, patiently waiting for her husband to come and open it for her. Ashenden realized that she had never opened a door for herself. She did not know how to. In a minute the colonel with his old, old gait came to the door and opened it; she passed out and he followed. The little incident offered a key to their whole lives, and from it Ashenden began to reconstruct their histories, circumstances, and characters; but he pulled himself up: he could not allow himself the luxury of creation. He finished his dinner.

When he went into the hall he saw tied to the leg of a table a bull terrier and in passing mechanically put down his hand to fondle the dog's drooping, soft ears. The landlady was standing at the foot of the stairs.

"Whose is this lovely beast?" asked Ashenden.

"He belongs to Herr Caypor. Fritz, he is called. Herr Caypor says he has a longer pedigree than the King of England."

Fritz rubbed himself against Ashenden's leg and with his nose sought the palm of his hand. Ashenden went upstairs to fetch his hat, and when he came down saw Caypor standing at the entrance of the hotel talking with the landlady. From the sudden silence and their constrained manner he guessed that Caypor had been

making enquiries about him. When he passed between them, into the street, out of the corner of his eye he saw Caypor give him a suspicious stare. That frank, jovial red face bore then a look of shifty cunning.

Ashenden strolled along till he found a tavern where he could have his coffee in the open, and to compensate himself for the bottle of beer that his sense of duty had urged him to drink at dinner ordered the best brandy the house provided. He was pleased at last to have come face to face with the man of whom he had heard so much and in a day or two hoped to become acquainted with him. It is never very difficult to get to know anyone who has a dog. But he was in no hurry; he would let things take their course: with the object he had in view he could not afford to be hasty.

Ashenden reviewed the circumstances. Grantley Caypor was an Englishman, born according to his passport in Birmingham, and he was forty-two years of age. His wife, to whom he had been married for eleven years, was of German birth and parentage. That was public knowledge. Information about his antecedents was contained in a private document. He had started life, according to this, in a lawyer's office in Birmingham and then had drifted into journalism. He had been connected with an English paper in Cairo and with another in Shanghai. There he got into trouble for attempting to get money on false pretenses and was sentenced to a short term of imprisonment. All trace of him was lost for two years after his release, when he reappeared in a shipping office in Marseilles. From there, still in the shipping business, he went to Hamburg, where he married, and to London. In London he set up for himself, in the export business, but after some time failed and was made a bankrupt. He returned to journalism. At the outbreak of war he was once more in the shipping business and in August, 1914, was living quietly with his German wife at Southampton. In the beginning of the following year he told his employers that owing to the nationality of his wife his position was intolerable; they had no fault to find with him and, recognizing that he was in an awkward fix, granted his request that he should be transferred to Genoa. Here he remained till Italy entered the war, but then gave notice and with his papers in perfect order crossed the border and took up his residence in Switzerland.

All this indicated a man of doubtful honesty and unsettled disposition, with no background and of no financial standing; but the facts were of no importance to anyone till it was discovered that

Caypor, certainly from the beginning of the war and perhaps sooner, was in the service of the German Intelligence Department. He had a salary of forty pounds a month. But though dangerous and wily no steps would have been taken to deal with him if he had contented himself with transmitting such news as he was able to get in Switzerland. He could do no great harm there and it might even be possible to make use of him to convey information that it was desirable to let the enemy have. He had no notion that anything was known of him. His letters, and he received a good many, were closely censored; there were few codes that the people who dealt with such matters could not in the end decipher and it might be that sooner or later through him it would be possible to lay hands on the organization that still flourished in England. But then he did something that drew R.'s attention to him. Had he known it none could have blamed him for shaking in his shoes: R. was not a very nice man to get on the wrong side of. Caypor scraped acquaintance in Zürich with a young Spaniard, Gomez by name, who had lately entered the British secret service, by his nationality inspired him with confidence, and managed to worm out of him the fact that he was engaged in espionage. Probably the Spaniard, with a very human desire to seem important, had done no more than talk mysteriously; but on Caypor's information he was watched when he went to Germany and one day caught just as he was posting a letter in a code that was eventually deciphered. He was tried, convicted, and shot. It was bad enough to lose a useful and disinterested agent, but it entailed besides the changing of a safe and simple code. R. was not pleased. But R. was not the man to let any desire of revenge stand in the way of his main object and it occurred to him that if Caypor was merely betraying his country for money it might be possible to get him to take more money to betray his employers. The fact that he had succeeded in delivering into their hands an agent of the Allies must seem to them an earnest of his good faith. He might be very useful. But R. had no notion what kind of man Caypor was, he had lived his shabby, furtive life obscurely, and the only photograph that existed of him was one taken for a passport. Ashenden's instructions were to get acquainted with Caypor and see whether there was any chance that he would work honestly for the British: if he thought there was, he was entitled to sound him and if his suggestions were met with favor to make certain propositions. It was a task that needed tact and a knowledge of men. If on the other hand Ashenden came

to the conclusion that Caypor could not be bought he was to watch and report his movements. The information he had obtained from Gustav was vague, but important; there was only one point in it that was interesting, and this was that the head of the German Intelligence Department in Berne was growing restive at Caypor's lack of activity. Caypor was asking for a higher salary and Major von P. had told him that he must earn it. It might be that he was urging him to go to England. If he could be induced to cross the frontier Ashenden's work was done.

"How the devil do you expect *me* to persuade him to put his head in a noose?" asked Ashenden.

"It won't be a noose, it'll be a firing squad," said R.

"Caypor's clever."

"Well, be cleverer, damn your eyes."

Ashenden made up his mind that he would take no steps to make Caypor's acquaintance, but allow the first advances to be made by him. If he was being pressed for results it must surely occur to him that it would be worth while to get into conversation with an Englishman who was employed in the Censorship Department. Ashenden was prepared with a supply of information that it could not in the least benefit the Central Powers to possess. With a false name and a false passport he had little fear that Caypor would guess that he was a British agent.

Ashenden did not have to wait long. Next day he was sitting in the doorway of the hotel, drinking a cup of coffee and already half asleep after a substantial *mittagessen*, when the Caypors came out of the dining room. Mrs. Caypor went upstairs and Caypor released his dog. The dog bounded along and in a friendly fashion leaped up against Ashenden.

"Come here, Fritz," cried Caypor, and then to Ashenden: "I'm so sorry. But he's quite gentle."

"Oh, that's all right. He won't hurt me."

Caypor stopped at the doorway.

"He's a bull terrier. You don't often see them on the Continent." He seemed while he spoke to be taking Ashenden's measure; he called to the maid. "A coffee, please, *fräulein*. You've just arrived, haven't you?"

"Yes, I came yesterday."

"Really? I didn't see you in the dining room last night. Are you making a stay?"

"I don't know. I've been ill and I've come here to recuperate."

The maid came with the coffee and seeing Caypor talking to Ashenden put the tray on the table at which he was sitting. Caypor gave a laugh of faint embarrassment.

"I don't want to force myself upon you. I don't know why the maid put my coffee on your table."

"Please sit down," said Ashenden.

"It's very good of you. I've lived so long on the Continent that I'm always forgetting that my countrymen are apt to look upon it as confounded cheek if you talk to them. Are you English, by the way, or American?"

"English," said Ashenden.

Ashenden was by nature a very shy person, and he had in vain tried to cure himself of a failing that at his age was unseemly, but on occasion he knew how to make effective use of it. He explained now in a hesitating and awkward manner the facts that he had the day before told the landlady and that he was convinced she had already passed on to Caypor.

"You couldn't have come to a better place than Lucerne. It's an oasis of peace in this war-weary world. When you're here you might almost forget that there is such a thing as a war going on. That is why I've come here. I'm a journalist by profession."

"I couldn't help wondering if you wrote," said Ashenden, with an eagerly timid smile.

It was clear that he had not learnt that "oasis of peace in a war-weary world" at the shipping office.

"You see, I married a German lady," said Caypor gravely.

"Oh, really?"

"I don't think anyone could be more patriotic than I am. I'm English through and through and I don't mind telling you that in my opinion the British Empire is the greatest instrument for good that the world has ever seen, but having a German wife I naturally see a good deal of the reverse of the medal. You don't have to tell me that the Germans have faults, but frankly I'm not prepared to admit that they're devils incarnate. At the beginning of the war my poor wife had a very rough time in England and I for one couldn't have blamed her if she'd felt rather bitter about it. Everyone thought she was a spy. It'll make you laugh when you know her. She's the typical German *hausfrau* who cares for nothing but her house and her husband and our only child Fritz." Caypor fondled his dog and gave a little laugh. "Yes, Fritz, you are our child, aren't you? Naturally it made my position very awkward,

I was connected with some very important papers, and my editors weren't quite comfortable about it. Well, to cut a long story short I thought the most dignified course was to resign and come to a neutral country till the storm blew over. My wife and I never discuss the war, though I'm bound to tell you that it's more on my account than hers, she's much more tolerant than I am and she's more willing to look upon this terrible business from my point of view than I am from hers."

"That is strange," said Ashenden. "As a rule women are so much more rabid than men."

"My wife is a very remarkable person. I should like to introduce you to her. By the way, I don't know if you know my name, Grantley Caypor."

"My name is Somerville," said Ashenden.

He told him then of the work he had been doing in the Censorship Department, and he fancied that into Caypor's eyes came a certain intentness. Presently he told him that he was looking for someone to give him conversation lessons in German so that he might rub up his rusty knowledge of the language; and as he spoke a notion flashed across his mind: he gave Caypor a look and saw that the same notion had come to him. It had occurred to them at the same instant that it would be a very good plan for Ashenden's teacher to be Mrs. Caypor.

"I asked our landlady if she could find me someone and she said she thought she could. I must ask her again. It ought not to be very hard to find a man who is prepared to come and talk German to me for an hour a day."

"I wouldn't take anyone on the landlady's recommendation," said Caypor. "After all you want someone with a good north German accent and she only talks Swiss. I'll ask my wife if she knows anyone. My wife's a very highly educated woman and you could trust her recommendation."

"That's very kind of you."

Ashenden observed Grantley Caypor at his ease. He noticed how the small, grey-green eyes, which last night he had not been able to see, contradicted the red good-humored frankness of the face. They were quick and shifty, but when the mind behind them was seized by an unexpected notion they were suddenly still. It gave one a peculiar feeling of the working of the brain. They were not eyes that inspired confidence; Caypor did that with his jolly, good-natured smile, the openness of his broad, weather-beaten face, his

comfortable obesity, and the cheeriness of his loud, deep voice. He was doing his best now to be agreeable. While Ashenden talked to him, a little shyly still but gaining confidence from that breezy, cordial manner, capable of putting anyone at his ease, it intrigued him to remember that the man was a common spy. It gave a tang to his conversation to reflect that he had been ready to sell his country for no more than forty pounds a month. Ashenden had known Gomez, the young Spaniard whom Caypor had betrayed. He was a high-spirited youth, with a love of adventure, and he had undertaken his dangerous mission not for the money he earned by it, but from a passion for romance. It amused him to outwit the clumsy German and it appealed to his sense of the absurd to play a part in a shilling shocker. It was not very nice to think of him now six feet underground in a prison yard. He was young and he had a certain grace of gesture. Ashenden wondered whether Caypor had felt a qualm when he delivered him up to destruction.

"I suppose you know a little German?" asked Caypor, interested in the stranger.

"Oh, yes, I was a student in Germany, and I used to talk it fluently, but that is long ago and I have forgotten. I can still read it very comfortably."

"Oh, yes, I noticed you were reading a German book last night."

Fool! It was only a little while since he had told Ashenden that he had not seen him at dinner. He wondered whether Caypor had observed the slip. How difficult it was never to make one! Ashenden must be on his guard; the thing that made him most nervous was the thought that he might not answer readily enough to his assumed name of Somerville. Of course there was always the chance that Caypor had made the slip on purpose to see by Ashenden's face whether he noticed anything. Caypor got up.

"There is my wife. We go for a walk up one of the mountains every afternoon. I can tell you some charming walks. The flowers even now are lovely."

"I'm afraid I must wait till I'm a bit stronger," said Ashenden, with a little sigh.

He had naturally a pale face and never looked as robust as he was. Mrs. Caypor came downstairs and her husband joined her. They walked down the road, Fritz bounding round them, and Ashenden saw that Caypor immediately began to speak with volubility. He was evidently telling his wife the results of his interview with Ashenden. Ashenden looked at the sun shining so gaily on the

lake; the shadow of a breeze fluttered the green leaves of the trees; everything invited to a stroll: he got up, went to his room, and throwing himself on his bed had a very pleasant sleep.

He went into dinner that evening as the Caypors were finishing, for he had wandered melancholy about Lucerne in the hope of finding a cocktail that would enable him to face the potato salad that he foresaw; and on their way out of the dining room Caypor stopped and asked him if he would drink coffee with them. When Ashenden joined them in the hall Caypor got up and introduced him to his wife. She bowed stiffly and no answering smile came to her face to respond to Ashenden's civil greeting. It was not hard to see that her attitude was definitely hostile. It put Ashenden at his ease. She was a plainish woman, nearing forty, with a muddy skin and vague features; her drab hair was arranged in a plait round her head like that of Napoleon's Queen of Prussia; and she was squarely built, plump rather than fat, and solid. But she did not look stupid; she looked on the contrary a woman of character and Ashenden, who had lived enough in Germany to recognize the type, was ready to believe that though capable of doing the housework, cooking the dinner, and climbing a mountain, she might be also prodigiously well informed. She wore a white blouse that showed a sunburned neck, a black skirt, and heavy walking boots. Caypor addressing her in English told her in his jovial way, as though she did not know it already, what Ashenden had told him about himself. She listened grimly.

"I think you told me you understood German," said Caypor, his big red face wreathed in polite smiles but his little eyes darting about restlessly.

"Yes, I was for some time a student in Heidelberg."

"Really?" said Mrs. Caypor in English, an expression of faint interest for a moment chasing away the sullenness from her face. "I know Heidelberg very well. I was at school there for one year."

Her English was correct, but throaty, and the mouthing emphasis she gave her words was disagreeable. Ashenden was diffuse in praise of the old university town and the beauty of the neighborhood. She heard him, from the standpoint of her Teutonic superiority, with toleration rather than with enthusiasm.

"It is well known that the valley of the Neckar is one of the beauty places of the whole world," she said.

"I have not told you, my dear," said Caypor then, "that Mr. Somerville is looking for someone to give him conversation lessons

while he is here. I told him that perhaps you could suggest a teacher."

"No, I know no one whom I could conscientiously recommend," she answered. "The Swiss accent is hateful beyond words. It could do Mr. Somerville only harm to converse with a Swiss."

"If I were in your place, Mr. Somerville, I would try and persuade my wife to give you lessons. She is, if I may say so, a very cultivated and highly educated woman."

"*Ach*, Grantley, I have not the time. I have my own work to do."

Ashenden saw that he was being given his opportunity. The trap was prepared and all he had to do was to fall in. He turned to Mrs. Caypor with a manner that he tried to make shy, deprecating, and modest.

"Of course it would be too wonderful if you would give me lessons. I should look upon it as a real privilege. Naturally I wouldn't want to interfere with your work, I am just here to get well, with nothing in the world to do, and I would suit my time entirely to your convenience."

He felt a flash of satisfaction pass from one to the other and in Mrs. Caypor's blue eyes he fancied that he saw a dark glow.

"Of course it would be a purely business arrangement," said Caypor. "There's no reason that my good wife shouldn't earn a little pin money. Would you think ten francs an hour too much?"

"No," said Ashenden, "I should think myself lucky to get a first-rate teacher for that."

"What do you say, my dear? Surely you can spare an hour, and you would be doing this gentleman a kindness. He would learn that all Germans are not the devilish fiends that they think them in England."

On Mrs. Caypor's brow was an uneasy frown and Ashenden could not but think with apprehension of that hour's conversation a day that he was going to exchange with her. Heaven only knew how he would have to rack his brain for subjects of discourse with that heavy and morose woman. Now she made a visible effort.

"I shall be very pleased to give Mr. Somerville conversation lessons."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Somerville," said Caypor noisily. "You're in for a treat. When will you start, tomorrow at eleven?"

"That would suit me very well if it suits Mrs. Caypor."

"Yes, that is as good an hour as another," she answered.

Ashenden left them to discuss the happy outcome of their diplo-

macy. But when, punctually at eleven next morning, he heard a knock at his door (for it had been arranged that Mrs. Caypor should give him his lesson in his room) it was not without trepidation that he opened it. It behooved him to be frank, a trifle indiscreet, but obviously wary of a German woman, sufficiently intelligent, and impulsive. Mrs. Caypor's face was dark and sulky. She plainly hated having anything to do with him. But they sat down and she began, somewhat peremptorily, to ask him questions about his knowledge of German literature. She corrected his mistakes with exactness and, when he put before her some difficulty in German construction, explained it with clearness and precision. It was obvious that though she hated giving him a lesson she meant to give it conscientiously. She seemed to have not only an aptitude for teaching but a love of it, and as the hour went on she began to speak with greater earnestness. It was already only by an effort that she remembered that he was a brutal Englishman. Ashenden, noticing the unconscious struggle within her, found himself not a little entertained; and it was with truth that, when later in the day Caypor asked him how the lesson had gone, he answered that it was highly satisfactory; Mrs. Caypor was an excellent teacher and a most interesting person.

"I told you so. She's the most remarkable woman I know."

And Ashenden had a feeling that when in his hearty, laughing way Caypor said this he was for the first time entirely sincere.

In a day or two Ashenden guessed that Mrs. Caypor was giving him lessons only in order to enable Caypor to arrive at a closer intimacy with him, for she confined herself strictly to matters of literature, music and painting; and when Ashenden, by way of experiment, brought the conversation round to the war, she cut him short.

"I think that is a topic that we had better avoid, Herr Somerville," she said.

She continued to give her lessons with the greatest thoroughness, and he had his money's worth, but every day she came with the same sullen face and it was only in the interest of teaching that she lost for a moment her instinctive dislike of him. Ashenden exercised in turn, but in vain, all his wiles. He was ingratiating, ingenuous, humble, grateful, flattering, simple, and timid. She remained coldly hostile. She was a fanatic. Her patriotism was aggressive, but disinterested, and obsessed with the notion of the superiority of all things German; she loathed England with a vir-

ulent hatred because in that country she saw the chief obstacle to their diffusion. Her ideal was a German world in which the rest of the nations under a hegemony greater than that of Rome should enjoy the benefits of German science and German art and German culture. There was in the conception a magnificent impudence that appealed to Ashenden's sense of humor. She was no fool. She had read much, in several languages, and she could talk of the books she had read with good sense. She had a knowledge of modern painting and modern music that not a little impressed Ashenden. It was amusing once to hear her before luncheon play one of those silvery little pieces of Debussy: she played it disdainfully because it was French and so light, but with an angry appreciation of its grace and gaiety. When Ashenden congratulated her she shrugged her shoulders.

"The decadent music of a decadent nation," she said. Then with powerful hands she struck the first resounding chords of a sonata by Beethoven; but she stopped. "I cannot play, I am out of practice, and you English, what do you know of music? You have not produced a composer since Purcell!"

"What do you think of that statement?" Ashenden, smiling, asked Caypor, who was standing near.

"I confess its truth. The little I know of music my wife taught me. I wish you could hear her play when she is in practice." He put his fat hand, with its square, stumpy fingers, on her shoulder. "She can wring your heartstrings with pure beauty."

"*Dummer Kerl*," she said, in a soft voice, "Stupid fellow," and Ashenden saw her mouth for a moment quiver, but she quickly recovered. "You English, you cannot paint, you cannot model, you cannot write music."

"Some of us can at times write pleasing verses," said Ashenden, with good humor, for it was not his business to be put out, and, he did not know why, two lines occurring to him he said them:

"'Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West. . .'"

"Yes," said Mrs. Caypor, with a strange gesture, "you can write poetry. I wonder why."

And to Ashenden's surprise she went on, in her guttural English, to recite the next two lines of the poem he had quoted.

"Come, Grantley, *mittagessen* is ready, let us go into the dining room."

They left Ashenden reflective.

Ashenden admired goodness, but was not outraged by wickedness. People sometimes thought him heartless because he was more often interested in others than attached to them, and even in the few to whom he was attached his eyes saw with equal clearness the merits and the defects. When he liked people it was not because he was blind to their faults, he did not mind their faults but accepted them with a tolerant shrug of the shoulders, or because he ascribed to them excellences that they did not possess; and since he judged his friends with candor they never disappointed him and so he seldom lost one. He asked from none more than he could give. He was able to pursue his study of the Caypors without prejudice and without passion. Mrs. Caypor seemed to him more of a piece and therefore the easier of the two to understand; she obviously detested him; though it was so necessary for her to be civil to him her antipathy was strong enough to wring from her now and then an expression of rudeness; and had she been safely able to do so she would have killed him without a qualm. But in the pressure of Caypor's chubby hand on his wife's shoulder and in the fugitive trembling of her lips Ashenden had divined that this unprepossessing woman and that mean fat man were joined together by a deep and sincere love. It was touching. Ashenden assembled the observations that he had been making for the past few days, and little things that he had noticed but to which he had attached no significance returned to him. It seemed to him that Mrs. Caypor loved her husband because she was of a stronger character than he and because she felt his dependence on her; she loved him for his admiration of her, and you might guess that till she met him this dumpy, plain woman with her dullness, good sense, and want of humor could not have much enjoyed the admiration of men; she enjoyed his heartiness and his noisy jokes, and his high spirits stirred her sluggish blood; he was a great big bouncing boy and he would never be anything else and she felt like a mother towards him; she had made him what he was, and he was her man and she was his woman, and she loved him, notwithstanding his weakness (for with her clear head she must always have been conscious of that), she loved him, *ach, was*, as Isolde loved Tristan. But then there was the espionage. Even Ashenden with all his tolerance for human frailty could not but feel that to betray your country for money is not a very pretty proceeding. Of course she knew of it, indeed it was probably through her that Caypor had first been approached; he would never have undertaken such work if she had

not urged him to it. She loved him and she was an honest and an upright woman. By what devious means had she persuaded herself to force her husband to adopt so base and dishonorable a calling? Ashenden lost himself in a labyrinth of conjecture as he tried to piece together the actions of her mind.

Grantley Caypor was another story. There was little to admire in him, but at that moment Ashenden was not looking for an object of admiration; but there was much that was singular and much that was unexpected in that gross and vulgar fellow. Ashenden watched with entertainment the suave manner in which the spy tried to inveigle him in his toils. It was a couple of days after his first lesson that Caypor after dinner, his wife having gone upstairs, threw himself heavily into a chair by Ashenden's side. His faithful Fritz came up to him and put his long muzzle with its black nose on his knee.

"He has no brain," said Caypor, "but a heart of gold. Look at those little pink eyes. Did you ever see anything so stupid? And what an ugly face, but what incredible charm!"

"Have you had him long?" asked Ashenden.

"I got him in 1914 just before the outbreak of war. By the way, what do you think of the news today? Of course my wife and I never discuss the war. You can't think what a relief to me it is to find a fellow-countryman to whom I can open my heart."

He handed Ashenden a cheap Swiss cigar and Ashenden, making a rueful sacrifice to duty, accepted it.

"Of course they haven't got a chance, the Germans," said Caypor, "not a dog's chance. I knew they were beaten the moment we came in."

His manner was earnest, sincere, and confidential. Ashenden made a commonplace rejoinder.

"It's the greatest grief of my life that owing to my wife's nationality I was unable to do any war work. I tried to enlist the day war broke out, but they wouldn't have me on account of my age, but I don't mind telling you, if the war goes on much longer, wife or no wife, I'm going to do something. With my knowledge of languages I ought to be of some service in the Censorship Department. That's where you were, wasn't it?"

That was the mark at which he had been aiming and in answer now to his well-directed questions Ashenden gave him the information that he had already prepared. Caypor drew his chair a little nearer and dropped his voice.

"I'm sure you wouldn't tell me anything that anyone shouldn't know, but after all these Swiss are absolutely pro-German and we don't want to give anyone the chance of overhearing."

Then he went on another tack. He told Ashenden a number of things that were of a certain secrecy.

"I wouldn't tell this to anybody else, you know, but I have one or two friends who are in pretty influential positions, and they know they can trust me."

Thus encouraged Ashenden was a little more deliberately indiscreet and when they parted both had reason to be satisfied. Ashenden guessed that Caypor's typewriter would be kept busy next morning and that extremely energetic major in Berne would shortly receive a most interesting report.

One evening, going upstairs after dinner, Ashenden passed an open bathroom. He caught sight of the Caypors.

"Come in," cried Caypor in his cordial way. "We're washing our Fritz."

The bull terrier was constantly getting himself very dirty, and it was Caypor's pride to see him clean and white. Ashenden went in. Mrs. Caypor with her sleeves turned up and a large white apron was standing at one end of the bath, while Caypor, in a pair of trousers and a singlet, his fat, freckled arms bare, was soaping the wretched hound.

"We have to do it at night," he said, "because the Fitzgeralds use this bath and they'd have a fit if they knew we washed the dog in it. We wait till they go to bed. Come along, Fritz, show the gentleman how beautifully you behave when you have your face scrubbed."

The poor brute, weebegone but faintly wagging his tail to show that however foul was this operation performed on him he bore no malice to the god who did it, was standing in the middle of the bath in six inches of water. He was soaped all over and Caypor, talking the while, shampooed him with his great fat hands.

"Oh, what a beautiful dog he's going to be when he's as white as the driven snow. His master will be as proud as Punch to walk out with him and all the little lady-dogs will say: good gracious, who's that beautiful aristocratic-looking bull terrier walking as though he owned the whole of Switzerland? Now stand still while you have your ears washed. You couldn't bear to go out into the street with dirty ears, could you? like a nasty little Swiss schoolboy. *Noblesse oblige*. Now the black nose. Oh, and all the soap is going

into his little pink eyes and they'll smart."

Mrs. Caypor listened to this nonsense with a good-humored sluggish smile on her broad, plain face, and presently gravely took a towel.

"Now he's going to have a ducking. Upsie-daisy."

Caypor seized the dog by the forelegs and ducked him once and ducked him twice. There was a struggle, a flurry, and a splashing. Caypor lifted him out of the bath.

"Now go to Mother and she'll dry you."

Mrs. Caypor sat down and taking the dog between her strong legs rubbed him till the sweat poured off her forehead. And Fritz, a little shaken and breathless, but happy it was all over, stood, with his sweet stupid face, white and shining.

"Blood will tell," cried Caypor exultantly. "He knows the names of no less than sixty-four of his ancestors, and they were all nobly born."

Ashenden was faintly troubled. He shivered a little as he walked upstairs.

Then, one Sunday, Caypor told him that he and his wife were going on an excursion and would eat their luncheon at some little mountain restaurant; and he suggested that Ashenden, each paying his share, should come with them. After three weeks at Lucerne Ashenden thought that his strength would permit him to venture the exertion. They started early, Mrs. Caypor businesslike in her walking boots and Tyrolese hat and alpenstock, and Caypor in stockings and plus-fours looking very British. The situation amused Ashenden and he was prepared to enjoy his day; but he meant to keep his eyes open; it was not inconceivable that the Caypors had discovered what he was and it would not do to go too near a precipice: Mrs. Caypor would not hesitate to give him a push and Caypor for all his jolliness was an ugly customer. But on the face of it there was nothing to mar Ashenden's pleasure in the golden morning. The air was fragrant. Caypor was full of conversation. He told funny stories. He was gay and jovial. The sweat rolled off his great red face and he laughed at himself because he was so fat. To Ashenden's astonishment he showed a peculiar knowledge of the mountain flowers. Once he went out of the way to pick one he saw a little distance from the path and brought it back to his wife. He looked at it tenderly.

"Isn't it lovely?" he cried, and his shifty grey-green eyes for a moment were as candid as a child's. "It's like a poem by Walter

Savage Landor."

"Botany is my husband's favorite science," said Mrs. Caypor. "I laugh at him sometimes. He is devoted to flowers. Often when we have hardly had enough money to pay the butcher he has spent everything in his pocket to bring me a bunch of roses."

"Qui fleurit sa maison fleurit son cœur," said Grantley Caypor.

Ashenden had once or twice seen Caypor, coming in from a walk, offer Mrs. Fitzgerald a nosegay of mountain flowers with an elephantine courtesy that was not entirely displeasing; and what he had just learned added a certain significance to the pretty little action. His passion for flowers was genuine and when he gave them to the old Irish lady he gave her something he valued. It showed a real kindness of heart. Ashenden had always thought botany a tedious science, but Caypor, talking exuberantly as they walked along, was able to impart to it life and interest. He must have given it a good deal of study.

"I've never written a book," he said. "There are too many books already and any desire to write I have is satisfied by the more immediately profitable and quite ephemeral composition of an article for a daily paper. But if I stay here much longer I have half a mind to write a book about the wildflowers of Switzerland. Oh, I wish you'd been here a little earlier. They were marvelous. But one wants to be a poet for that, and I'm only a poor newspaperman."

It was curious to observe how he was able to combine real emotion with false fact.

When they reached the inn, with its view of the mountains and the lake, it was good to see the sensual pleasure with which he poured down his throat a bottle of ice-cold beer. You could not but feel sympathy for a man who took so much delight in simple things. They lunched deliciously off scrambled eggs and mountain trout. Even Mrs. Caypor was moved to an unwonted gentleness by her surroundings; the inn was in an agreeably rural spot, it looked like a picture of a Swiss chalet in a book of early nineteenth century travels; and she treated Ashenden with something less than her usual hostility. When they arrived she had burst into loud German exclamations on the beauty of the scene, and now, softened perhaps too by food and drink, her eyes, dwelling on the grandeur before her, filled with tears. She stretched out her hand.

"It is dreadful and I am ashamed, notwithstanding this horrible and unjust war I can feel in my heart at the moment nothing but happiness and gratitude."

Caypor took her hand and pressed it and, an unusual thing with him, addressing her in German, called her little pet-names. It was absurd, but touching. Ashenden, leaving them to their emotions, strolled through the garden and sat down on a bench that had been prepared for the comfort of the tourist. The view was of course spectacular, but it captured you; it was like a piece of music that was obvious and meretricious, but for the moment shattered your self-control.

And as Ashenden lingered idly in that spot he pondered over the mystery of Grantley Caypor's treachery. If he liked strange people he had found in him one who was strange beyond belief. It would be foolish to deny that he had amiable traits. His joviality was not assumed, he was without pretense a hearty fellow, and he had real good nature. He was always ready to do a kindness. Ashenden had often watched him with the old Irish colonel and his wife who were the only other residents of the hotel; he would listen good-humoredly to the old man's tedious stories of the Egyptian war, and he was charming with her. Now that Ashenden had arrived at terms of some familiarity with Caypor he found that he regarded him less with repulsion than with curiosity. He did not think that he had become a spy merely for the money; he was a man of modest tastes and what he had earned in a shipping office must have sufficed to so good a manager as Mrs. Caypor; and after war was declared there was no lack of remunerative work for men over the military age. It might be that he was one of those men who prefer devious ways to straight for some intricate pleasure they get in fooling their fellows; and that he had turned spy, not from hatred of the country that had imprisoned him, not even from love of his wife, but from a desire to score off the big wigs who never even knew of his existence. It might be that it was vanity that impelled him, a feeling that his talents had not received the recognition they merited, or just a puckish, impish desire to do mischief. He was a crook. It is true that only two cases of dishonesty had been brought home to him, but if he had been caught twice it might be surmised that he had often been dishonest without being caught. What did Mrs. Caypor think of this? They were so united that she must be aware of it. Did it make her ashamed, for her own uprightness surely none could doubt, or did she accept it as an inevitable kink in the man she loved? Did she do all she could to prevent it or did she close her eyes to something she could not help?

How much easier life would be if people were all black or all

white and how much simpler it would be to act in regard to them! Was Caypor a good man who loved evil or a bad man who loved good? And how could such unreconcilable elements exist side by side and in harmony within the same heart? For one thing was clear, Caypor was disturbed by no gnawing of conscience; he did his mean and despicable work with gusto. He was a traitor who enjoyed his treachery. Though Ashenden had been studying human nature more or less consciously all his life, it seemed to him that he knew as little about it now in middle age as he had done when he was a child. Of course R. would have said to him: why the devil do you waste your time with such nonsense? The man's a dangerous spy and your business is to lay him by the heels.

That was true enough. Ashenden had decided that it would be useless to attempt to make any arrangement with Caypor. Though doubtless he would have no feeling about betraying his employers he could certainly not be trusted. His wife's influence was too strong. Besides, notwithstanding what he had from time to time told Ashenden, he was in his heart convinced that the Central Powers must win the war, and he meant to be on the winning side. Well, then Caypor must be laid by the heels, but how he was to effect that Ashenden had no notion. Suddenly he heard a voice.

"There you are. We've been wondering where you had hidden yourself."

He looked round and saw the Caypors strolling towards him. They were walking hand in hand.

"So this is what has kept you so quiet," said Caypor as his eyes fell on the view. "What a spot!"

Mrs. Caypor clasped her hands.

"*Ach Gott, wie schön!*" she cried. "*Wie schön.* When I look at that blue lake and those snowy mountains I feel inclined, like Goëthe's Faust, to cry to the passing moment: tarry."

"This is better than being in England with the excursions and alarms of war, isn't it?" said Caypor.

"Much," said Ashenden.

"By the way, did you have any difficulty in getting out?"

"No, not the smallest."

"I'm told they make rather a nuisance of themselves at the frontier nowadays."

"I came through without the smallest difficulty. I don't fancy they bother much about the English. I thought the examination of passports was quite perfunctory."

A fleeting glance passed between Caypor and his wife. Ashenden wondered what it meant. It would be strange if Caypor's thoughts were occupied with the chances of a journey to England at the very moment when he was himself reflecting on its possibility. In a little while Mrs. Caypor suggested that they had better be starting back and they wandered together in the shade of trees down the mountain paths.

Ashenden was watchful. He could do nothing (and his inactivity irked him) but wait with his eyes open to seize the opportunity that might present itself. A couple of days later an incident occurred that made him certain something was in the wind. In the course of his morning lesson Mrs. Caypor remarked:

"My husband has gone to Geneva today. He had some business to do there."

"Oh," said Ashenden, "will he be gone long?"

"No, only two days."

It is not everyone who can tell a lie and Ashenden had the feeling, he hardly knew why, that Mrs. Caypor was telling one then. Her manner perhaps was not quite as indifferent as you would have expected when she was mentioning a fact that could be of no interest to Ashenden. It flashed across his mind that Caypor had been summoned to Berne to see the redoubtable head of the German secret service. When he had the chance he said casually to the waitress:

"A little less work for you to do, *fräulein*. I hear that Herr Caypor has gone to Berne."

"Yes. But he'll be back tomorrow."

That proved nothing, but it was something to go upon. Ashenden knew in Lucerne a Swiss who was willing in an emergency to do odd jobs and, looking him up, asked him to take a letter to Berne. It might be possible to pick up Caypor and trace his movements. Next day Caypor appeared once more with his wife at the dinner table, but merely nodded to Ashenden and afterwards both went straight upstairs. They looked troubled. Caypor, as a rule so animated, walked with bowed shoulders and looked neither to the right nor to the left. Next morning Ashenden received a reply to his letter: Caypor had seen Major von P. It was possible to guess what the major had said to him. Ashenden well knew how rough he could be: he was a hard man and a brutal, clever, and unscrupulous one and he was not accustomed to mince his words. They were tired of paying Caypor a salary to sit still in Lucerne and do

nothing; the time was come for him to go to England. Guess-work? Of course it was guess-work, but in that trade it mostly was: you had to deduce the animal from its jawbone. Ashenden knew from Gustav that the Germans wanted to send someone to England. He drew a long breath; if Caypor went he would have to get busy.

When Mrs. Caypor came in to give him his lesson she was dull and listless. She looked tired and her mouth was set obstinately. It occurred to Ashenden that the Caypors had spent most of the night talking. He wished he knew what they had said. Did she urge him to go or did she try to dissuade him? Ashenden watched them again at luncheon. Something was the matter, for they hardly spoke to one another and as a rule they found plenty to talk about. They left the room early, but when Ashenden went out he saw Caypor sitting in the hall by himself.

"Hulloa," he cried jovially, but surely the effort was patent, "how are you getting on? I've been to Geneva."

"So I heard," said Ashenden.

"Come and have your coffee with me. My poor wife's got a headache. I told her she'd better go and lie down." In his shifty green eyes was an expression that Ashenden could not read. "The fact is, she's rather worried, poor dear; I'm thinking of going to England."

Ashenden's heart gave a sudden leap against his ribs, but his face remained impassive:

"Oh, are you going for long? We shall miss you."

"To tell you the truth, I'm fed up with doing nothing. The war looks as though it were going on for years and I can't sit here indefinitely. Besides, I can't afford it, I've got to earn my living. I may have a German wife, but I am an Englishman, hang it all, and I want to do my bit. I could never face my friends again if I just stayed here in ease and comfort till the end of the war and never attempted to do a thing to help the country. My wife takes her German point of view and I don't mind telling you that she's a bit upset. You know what women are."

Now Ashenden knew what it was that he saw in Caypor's eyes. Fear. It gave him a nasty turn. Caypor didn't want to go to England, he wanted to stay safely in Switzerland; Ashenden knew now what the major had said to him when he went to see him in Berne. He had got to go or lose his salary. What was it that his wife had said when he told her what had happened? He had wanted her to press him to stay, but, it was plain, she hadn't done that; perhaps he had

not dared tell her how frightened he was; to her he had always been gay, bold, adventurous and devil-may-care; and now, the prisoner of his own lies, he had not found it in him to confess himself the mean and sneaking coward he was.

"Are you going to take your wife with you?" asked Ashenden.

"No, she'll stay here."

It had been arranged very neatly. Mrs. Caypor would receive his letters and forward the information they contained to Berne.

"I've been out of England so long that I don't quite know how to set about getting war work. What would you do in my place?"

"I don't know; what sort of work are you thinking of?"

"Well, you know, I imagine I could do the same thing as you did. I wonder if there's anyone in the Censorship Department that you could give me a letter of introduction to."

It was only by a miracle that Ashenden saved himself from showing by a smothered cry or by a broken gesture how startled he was; but not by Caypor's request, by what had just dawned upon him. What an idiot he had been! He had been disturbed by the thought that he was wasting his time at Lucerne, he was doing nothing, and though in fact, as it turned out, Caypor was going to England it was due to no cleverness of his. He could take to himself no credit for the result. And now he saw that he had been put in Lucerne, told how to describe himself and given the proper information, so that what actually had occurred should occur. It would be a wonderful thing for the German secret service to get an agent into the Censorship Department; and by a happy accident there was Grantley Caypor, the very man for the job, on friendly terms with someone who had worked there. What a bit of luck! Major von P. was a man of culture and, rubbing his hands, he must surely have murmured: *stultum facit fortuna quem bult perdere*. It was a trap of that devilish R. and the grim major at Berne had fallen into it. Ashenden had done his work just by sitting still and doing nothing. He almost laughed as he thought what a fool R. had made of him.

"I was on very good terms with the chief of my department, I could give you a note to him if you liked."

"That would be just the thing."

"But of course I must give the facts. I must say I've met you here and only known you a fortnight."

"Of course. But you'll say what else you can for me, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly."

"I don't know yet if I can get a visa. I'm told they're rather fussy."

"I don't see why. I shall be very sick if they refuse me one when I want to go back."

"I'll go and see how my wife is getting on," said Caypor suddenly, getting up. "When will you let me have that letter?"

"Whenever you like. Are you going at once?"

"As soon as possible."

Caypor left him. Ashenden waited in the hall for a quarter of an hour so that there should appear in him no sign of hurry. Then he went upstairs and prepared various communications. In one he informed R. that Caypor was going to England; in another he made arrangements through Berne that wherever Caypor applied for a visa it should be granted to him without question; and these he dispatched forthwith. When he went down to dinner he handed Caypor a cordial letter of introduction.

Next day but one Caypor left Lucerne.

Ashenden waited. He continued to have his hour's lesson with Mrs. Caypor and under her conscientious tuition began now to speak German with ease. They talked of Goëthe and Winckelmann, of art and life and travel. Fritz sat quietly by her chair.

"He misses his master," she said, pulling his ears. "He only really cares for him, he suffers me only as belonging to him."

After his lesson Ashenden went every morning to Cook's to ask for his letters. It was here that all communications were addressed to him. He could not move till he received instructions, but R. could be trusted not to leave him idle long; and meanwhile there was nothing for him to do but have patience. Presently he received a letter from the consul in Geneva to say that Caypor had there applied for his visa and had set out for France. Having read this Ashenden went on for a little stroll by the lake and on his way back happened to see Mrs. Caypor coming out of Cook's office. He guessed that she was having her letters addressed there, too. He went up to her.

"Have you had news of Herr Caypor?" he asked her.

"No," she said. "I suppose I could hardly expect to yet."

He walked along by her side. She was disappointed, but not yet anxious; she knew how irregular at that time was the post. But next day during the lesson he could not but see that she was impatient to have done with it. The post was delivered at noon and at five minutes to she looked at her watch and him. Though Ashenden knew very well that no letter would ever come for her he had not the heart to keep her on tenterhooks.

"Don't you think that's enough for the day? I'm sure you want to go down to Cook's," he said.

"Thank you. That is very amiable of you."

When a little later he went there himself he found her standing in the middle of the office. Her face was distraught. She addressed him wildly.

"My husband promised to write from Paris. I am sure there is a letter for me, but these stupid people say there's nothing. They're so careless, it's a scandal."

Ashenden did not know what to say. While the clerk was looking through the bundle to see if there was anything for him she came up to the desk again.

"When does the next post come in from France?" she asked.

"Sometimes there are letters about five."

"I'll come then."

She turned and walked rapidly away. Fritz followed her with his tail between his legs. There was no doubt of it, already the fear had seized her that something was wrong. Next morning she looked dreadful; she could not have closed her eyes all night; and in the middle of the lesson she started up from her chair.

"You must excuse me, Herr Somerville, I cannot give you a lesson today. I am not feeling well."

Before Ashenden could say anything she had flung nervously from the room, and in the evening he got a note from her to say that she regretted that she must discontinue giving him conversation lessons. She gave no reason. Then Ashenden saw no more of her; she ceased coming in to meals; except to go morning and afternoon to Cook's she spent apparently the whole day in her room. Ashenden thought of her sitting there hour after hour with that hideous fear gnawing at her heart. Who could help feeling sorry for her? The time hung heavy on his hands, too. He read a good deal and wrote a little, he hired a canoe and went for long leisurely paddles on the lake; and at last one morning the clerk at Cook's handed him a letter. It was from R. It had all the appearance of a business communication, but between the lines he read a good deal.

Dear Sir, it began, The goods, with accompanying letter, dispatched by you from Lucerne have been duly delivered. We are obliged to you for executing our instructions with such promptness.

It went on in this strain. R. was exultant. Ashenden guessed that Caypor had been arrested and by now had paid the penalty of his

crime. He shuddered. He remembered a dreadful scene. Dawn. A cold, grey dawn, with a drizzling rain falling. A man, blindfolded, standing against a wall, an officer very pale giving an order, a volley, and then a young soldier, one of the firing party, turning round and holding onto his gun for support, vomiting. The officer turned paler still, and he, Ashenden, feeling dreadfully faint. How terrified Caypor must have been! It was awful when the tears ran down their faces. Ashenden shook himself. He went to the ticket office and obedient to his orders bought himself a ticket for Geneva.

As he was waiting for his change Mrs. Caypor came in. He was shocked at the sight of her. She was blowsy and dishevelled and there were heavy rings round her eyes. She was deathly pale. She staggered up to the desk and asked for a letter. The clerk shook his head.

"I'm sorry, madam, there's nothing yet."

"But look, look. Are you sure? Please look again."

The misery in her voice was heart-rending. The clerk with a shrug of the shoulders took out the letters from a pigeonhole and sorted them once more.

"No, there's nothing, madam."

She gave a hoarse cry of despair and her face was distorted with anguish.

"Oh, God, oh, God," she moaned.

She turned away, the tears streaming from her weary eyes, and for a moment she stood there like a blind man groping and not knowing which way to go. Then a fearful thing happened. Fritz, the bull terrier, sat down on his haunches and threw back his head and gave a long, long melancholy howl. Mrs. Caypor looked at him with terror; her eyes seemed really to start from her head. The doubt, the gnawing doubt that had tortured her during those dreadful days of suspense, was a doubt no longer. She knew. She staggered blindly into the street.

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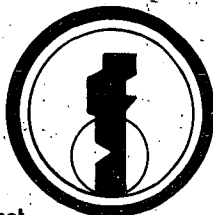
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Photograph by Berenice Abbott, Federal Arts Project, "Changing New York"; Museum of the City of New York.

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A SLIGHT MISCALCULATION by E. Camille Turner

Three figures stood before the old mansion in the pale skies of not yet morning.

"You're sure this will work?" the realtor asked nervously.

"Sir!" Thomas Radwig huffed. "My ghost eradicator has never failed me. Do you question the reputation of Ghost Getters, Incorporated?"

"Careful, Thomas," his wife and assistant whispered. "He may ask how many successes you've had."

Thomas ignored her and rechecked the bulky, battery-operated, metal contraption resting in the long grass. "All right, we're ready. If your garden ghost comes walking out tonight, this machine will counter the ethereal energies of matter which . . ."

"Look! There she is!" Thomas's wife interrupted, pointing wildly. "Thomas! It's a real ghost!"

Thomas gasped, knelt down, and rapidly began turning dials. A sudden crackling, hissing, and whining came from the machine, followed by a series of flashes. Blue arcs traced wild patterns back and forth among the wires, then seemed to reach out towards the misty figure before them. Then, stillness.

The three stared at the spot where the ghost had stood—still stood, only . . . changed.

"My God, what have you done, Radwig! How will I explain this?"

Thomas Radwig circled the thing before them, touched the solidity of it, and stroked his bearded chin.

"I don't see that it's a problem," he said finally. "I'm sure the prospective buyers would much prefer a statue in their garden, to a ghost."

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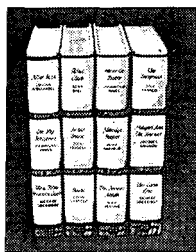
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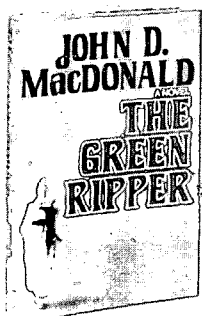
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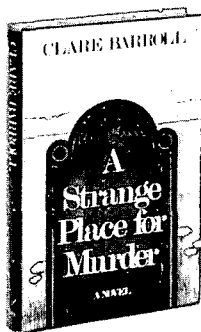
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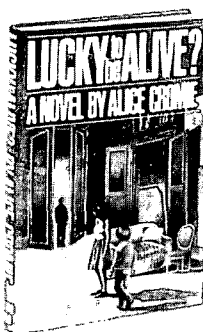
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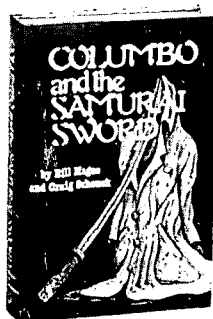
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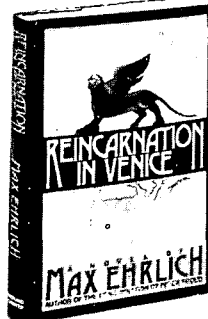
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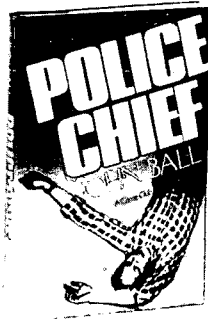
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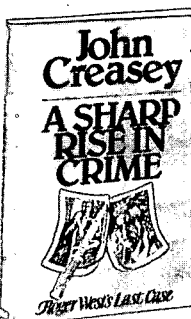
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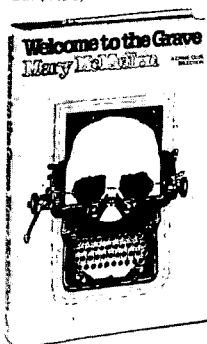
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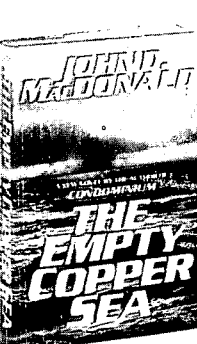
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